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Gotthold Ephraim Lessing.

NATHAN THE WISE

A DRAMATIC POEM

BY

GOTTHOLD EPHRAIM LESSING

"Introite, nam et heic Dii sunt!"
Apud Gellium.[1]

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN
BY PATRICK MAXWELL

Edited, with an Introduction, comprising a Biographical Sketch of the Author, a Critical Analysis of the Poem, and an Account of the Relations between Lessing and Moses Mendelssohn

BY

GEORGE ALEXANDER KOHUT

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TO

JACOB H. SCHIFF

THE AMERICAN NATHAN THE WISE

THIS VOLUME

IS

REVERENTLY INSCRIBED

BY THE EDITOR

"Welch ein Jude!
Und der so ganz nur Jude scheinen will!

(Act III, Scene VII, end.)

ADOLF VON SONNENTHAL

The celebrated Austrian actor, portraying the part of "Nathan"

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

EDITOR'S PREFACE

It would seem to be almost superfluous to write a *Foreword* to the present edition of Lessing's immortal epic. It is so plainly a preachment, that its stirring emotional appeal should, in itself, suffice. However, living at a time when at least one half of the civilized world is engaged in a war of extermination against the other half, and when the lofty ideals which Lessing and Mendelssohn strove to inculcate are in imminent danger of being swept aside in this vortex of passion and race antagonism, it behooves us to call attention, at the outset, to the masterful plea for tolerance and brotherhood which the poet makes in this vivid and picturesque drama. It is essentially a human document, with a message as vital and purposeful in these latter days as then, when the great Reformer strove to throw off the shackles of race pride, prejudice and religious fanaticism. Indeed, it might have been written for those of us, in the present day, who are still victims of stubborn sophistry and whose patriotism is largely a compound of arrogance and unreasoning egotism.

It is not for us to say who is responsible for this recrudescence of the savage instinct which has made itself felt for many decades and has flashed, like a flaming sword, dubiously guarding the gates to the

pathway of peace. But it is a significant fact that the Berlin Congress of 1878, from which Disraeli brought back "peace with honor"—after imposing his will upon all the delegates with regard to the political emancipation of the Jews in Roumania—was, after all, a fruitless victory in the cause of civilization. Treaty obligations then, as now, were either altogether ignored or adroitly avoided, and the fate of "the little people" held in bondage still hangs in the balance.

We have, to be sure, made great progress in the cause of human brotherhood: The establishment of the Hague Tribunal, with its gospel of arbitration, though perhaps more honored in the breach than in the observance, has brought us inevitably nearer to the ideal of universal brotherhood, preached by the prophets of Israel, and however calamitous for the human race the terrible ordeal may be through which the nations are passing, the struggle for mastery is so distinctly a test of the survival of what is best in our civilization, that it can not pass without leaving a blessing in its wake. Out of this holocaust must come a saner and sweeter humanity, and the realization that nation is linked to nation, not so much by ties of blood, a common tradition, a common language, and by other selfish considerations, but by the higher ideal of mutual responsibility and a sense of universal fellowship.

It is good to read the powerful lay-sermon which Lessing, that intrepid regenerator of the German spirit, preached from his stage-pulpit, just one hundred thirty-seven years ago. Seldom has such an utterance

been heard from a literary chancel. Nor was his a voice in the wilderness. His enlightened example was followed by no less a man than Joseph II, Emperor of Austria, who established the poll tax and the Jews' Budget (1781), and issued a Patent of Tolerance (January 2, 1782), removing all restrictions from the Jews. This illustrious monarch is the author of the following sublime prayer, which one cannot read without a quickening of the pulse and a feeling of profound gratitude:

"Eternal, incomprehensible Being! Thou art perfect toleration and love. Thy sun shines for the Christian as well as for the atheist. Thy rain fructifies the field of the erring as that of the orthodox; and the germ of every virtue lies in the hearts of both heathen and heretic. Thou teachest me thus, Eternal Being! toleration and love—teachest me that diverse views do not deter Thee from being a beneficent Father to all people. And shall I, Thy creature, be less tolerant, not conceding that everyone of my subjects may worship Thee in his own manner? Shall I persecute those who think differently from me, and convert the erring by the sword? No, Omnipotent! with Thy love, all-embracing Being, I shall be far from doing so. I will resemble Thee as far as a creature can resemble Thee —will be tolerant as Thou art! Henceforth be all intolerance in my country removed. Where is a religion that doth not teach the love of virtue and the abhorrence of vice? Everybody shall, therefore, be tolerated by me. Let everyone worship Thee, incomprehensible Being! in the manner which seemeth to him best. Do

errors of mind deserve banishment from society? Is severity, indeed, the means of winning the people; of converting the erring? Broken shall henceforth be the infamous fetters of intolerance! Instead of it, may the sweet bond of toleration and brotherly love unite forever! Amen."

As nobleness enkindles nobleness, it is but natural to find the same exalted sentiment voiced on behalf of Israel by a humble parish priest in Germany, who, in 1804, included this soulful plea in his "Prayer Book for Enlightened Catholic Christians":—

"Almighty, Everlasting God! I entreat Thee on behalf of a dispersed nation that has had to suffer much oppression and humiliation in days of yore. Ah! the misery of these unhappy people seemed to many to be a triumph of the teachings of Jesus, and in order to make this victory more luminous, they magnified their misery and destroyed every vestige of civic and domestic happiness in this industrious race.

"The religion of Jesus became hateful to them, because not a few professors of the same were their perpetual and almost sworn enemies. Never shall such an unworthy and inimical pride of creed beguile and corrupt me!

"Since, O my God, I have learned from Jesus that all men are brothers, I shall respect the human rights and privileges which they hold in common with me. Their very wretchedness and civic degradation shall imbue me, at all times, with the most lively desire to comfort them, to mitigate their sorrows, and to uplift them from the stupefying blow of their erstwhile de-

struction by the sympathy which I cherish for their destiny. Amen."

How fortunate for the human race that God never leaves Himself without a witness and that, in moments of great stress, some high-minded leader is found to champion the cause of righteousness!

Is it too much to hope that the blood which is now so generously spilt on the battlefields of Europe will wash away the guilt of race-pride and prejudice; obliterate the dark memories of German anti-semitism; of the Dreyfus scandal, and of the nameless horrors of the Russian pogroms, which are still a blot on the escutcheon of our common humanity?

The version of "Nathan the Wise" here printed, follows the text of Major-General Patrick Maxwell, published in The Scott Library series by Walter Scott, in London. It is esteemed to be the most accurate of all existing English translations, although perhaps not quite so graceful and elastic in style as Miss Ellen Frothingham's rendering (New York, 1867; reprinted in G. A. Kohut's "Hebrew Anthology," Cincinnati, 1913, Volume II). Like many of Lessing's dramas and comedies, it has been translated into Hebrew and Judaeo-German, proving that his popularity with the Jews is on a par with that of Schiller.

The illustrations in the volume include excellent portraits of Lessing and Mendelssohn; a likeness of the celebrated Austrian actor, Adolph von Sonnenthal,

in his character of Nathan, which has made him world-famous; and a reproduction from an old drawing, showing Lessing and Lavater at chess with their mutual friend, the celebrated Jewish philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn.

The facsimile of the original title page, as well as of a leaf of the author's first draught of the poem, in possession of a member of the Mendelssohn family in Berlin, should prove of considerable interest to the book-lover and antiquarian.

GEORGE ALEXANDER KOHUT.

New York, November 8, 1916.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

GOTTHOLD EPHRAIM LESSING was born January 22, 1729, at Camenz, in Upper Lusatia, and died at Brunswick, February 15, 1781.

He comes of a line of learned ancestors. For many generations, his family had been one of jurists, curates and burgo-masters. His father was a clergyman and his mother a pastor's daughter. His earliest known progenitor, likewise a curate, was one of the signers of the *formula concordiae,* published in 1580, which was designed to harmonize certain doctrinal dissensions. It is significant that he derived his liberal views by heredity, for we find that his grandfather had written a doctoral dissertation on the "Tolerance of Religions." His brothers followed academic pursuits, and to one of them we owe not only valuable comments on his published works, but an adequate and brilliant biography of this greatest regenerator of German literature.

When he was scarcely thirteen, Lessing was sent to the celebrated grammar school at Meissen, where he finished the prescribed course of study earlier than the average student. The dean, in answer to his father's inquiry concerning the boy's progress, replied: "He is a horse that needs double fodder. The lessons which are hard for others are nothing for

him. We can not use him much longer." In September, 1746, he entered the University of Leipsic as a theological student. After a few years at Wittenberg and Berlin, he took the degree of Master of Arts, on April 29, 1752.

Already in these early years, he showed a marked talent for dramatic composition. The first fruit of his literary labors was a comedy, entitled "The Young Scholar." It was a study from life, based largely upon his own experiences. It was produced with considerable success in Leipsic and gave him the first impetus to a literary career. While at grammar school, he had written several fugitive pieces, and, upon becoming acquainted with an interesting philosophic coterie at Leipsic, notably the young journalist Mylius, who exerted a marked influence over him, he wrote poetic burlesques of scientific subjects. His relations with Madame Neuber, whose troupe presented his first production, brought him into contact with the people of the stage. This displeased his parents, who feared that the kind of life he was leading would inevitably jeopardize his future. His letters home were full of filial piety and devotion, yet they showed an independence of spirit and a maturity of thought which gave indication of great promise. Characteristic is the following passage from one of these letters:

"The Christian religion is not a thing that ought to be received on trust from one's parents. The great mass of mankind, it is true, inherit it as they do their property, but their conduct shows what Christians they are."

It is significant that these letters were written by a young man scarcely twenty years old.

In Berlin, Lessing devoted himself to translations from foreign languages and, in conjunction with Mylius, founded a periodical devoted to the dramatic arts. He soon parted company with his friend, however, owing to a disagreement on literary subjects and became a contributor to Voss's *Gazette*. It was not long before he became well-known, through the individuality of his utterances. He maintained that there were no established canons of art and that every new genius modifies principles already recognized. He turned the searchlight of philosophy on literary criticism and blazed a new path for German letters. He denounced the pedantry and sentimentality which prevailed in high circles and inveighed against the dominance of the French classic drama, which was the model in Germany at the time. In consequence of his efforts, the German language and literature were emancipated, once and for all, from foreign influence. It must be remembered that Frederick the Great and his court had succumbed to the spell of Voltaire to such an extent that the great monarch was actually incapable of writing good idiomatic German. It was Lessing and, through him, his friend, Moses Mendelssohn, who gave to German style that tone and dignity which make the literature of the time so rich and distinctive. Permeated by English culture, Lessing endeavored to prove that the soul of man, and not his environment, represents all that is great and noble in dramatic poetry. To vindicate his point of view, he wrote, in

1753-55, a tragedy in prose, entitled "Miss Sara Sampson," which proved a complete success and liberated the German playwrights from their traditional limitations. This tragedy was first presented at Frankfort-on-the-Oder, July 10, 1755, and it is said that the spectators "sat for hours like statues and wept and wept". Although it was considered a theatrical triumph and had the distinction of being translated into French and English, its importance now is chiefly historical. After all, Lessing's fame rests upon his maturer contributions to dramatic literature, of which at least three, "Minna von Barnhelm", "Emilia Galotti" and "Nathan the Wise", representing, respectively, comedy, tragedy and didactic drama, have an intrinsic and permanent value.

The salient feature of "Minna von Barnhelm," published in 1767, is its national character. The chief personages in the love story are made to symbolize the natural ties of race which should bind together the different members of the German family, then alienated and antagonized by dynastic jealousies and interests. Goethe recalls the tremendous impression the comedy made upon the young people of his day and speaks of it with reminiscent enthusiasm.

Although the scene in "Emilia Galotti" is laid in Italy and gives a vivid picture of the old Roman Republic, the plot is wholly German in spirit and was designed to depict the tyrannical princelings of Lessing's own time and nation. The characters are admirably portrayed. The dialogue is simple and the plot and dramatic movement remarkably direct and

rapid. It was first presented at Brunswick, March 1, 1772, and has retained its popularity with German theatre-goers to this day.

Regarding "Nathan the Wise", the scene of which is laid in Jerusalem, during the Third Crusade, in the latter half of the 12th Century, more will be said in the subjoined INTRODUCTION to the poem. It is a dialogue in iambics, illustrating Lessing's own views of religious toleration and is generally recognized as one of the greatest masterpieces of German literature. It was published in 1779 and presented in Berlin, on April 4, 1783. From that day to this, it has delighted vast audiences, wherever produced, and the character of Nathan has made the fame of at least one distinguished actor—Adolf von Sonnenthal, who played the title role for almost two generations and was finally knighted by the Austrian emperor.

Struggling against poverty and forced into significant positions, in order to maintain himself, yet conscientiously providing for his family, who did not scruple to draw heavily upon his meager resources, it is astonishing that he should have been able to produce works of transcending merit, in his early manhood. Among these may be mentioned his "Fables", to which he subsequently added a Critical Commentary; his "Dramaturgie", a series of dramatic essays, as epoch-making in this field as the Laokoön is in the realm of art; the "Wolfenbüttel Fragments", which led to the famous controversy with Göze, the pastor in Hamburg, resulting in a series of learned and satirical papers, which are unique in polemic literature;

and numerous other works on ethical, philosophical and literary subjects, which round out a life of great achievement. A special interest attaches to his "Five Conversations for Freemasons" and his "Education of the Human Race", which express his ideas of government and society and embody his views of religious development.

When Lessing was about forty years old and his poverty became irksome, the post of Librarian at Wolfenbüttel was tendered him by the Duke of Brunswick, who, though a literary snob, was anxious to plume himself by attaching the now-celebrated author to his court. The six years he spent there proved anything but congenial. Routine work palled upon him and his finances were still so uncertain that he could not afford to marry, after having faithfully waited for his friend König's widow for years, during which time the strain of a romantic correspondence with her told upon his buoyant temperament. The "letters are full of the most beautiful sincerity, unselfishness and common-sense, regarding all matters of the intellect and emotions". It was not until 1776 that he finally married Eva König, only to lose her within a year. The days which followed were full of loneliness, though not from lack of friends or privation. He had again gone into debt to secure his wife's property to her children. In this, as in all other concerns of his life, he showed himself truly heroic, chivalrous, gentle and sympathetic. It has been well said that the dominant passion in his heart was not criticism but sympathy, and, while he was

forced into controversy, he contrived to retain his splendid bravado, poise and noble courage, which made him a formidable antagonist. He fought for a principle and never degraded his literary warfare to the level of calumny. He was a brave champion of human rights and exemplified in himself the traits which adorn his noblest character in fiction—"Nathan the Wise".

In 1775, Lessing accompanied the Crown Prince of Brunswick to Italy and met with an enthusiastic ovation wherever he went. In Vienna, the Empress Maria Theresa sent for him and consulted him with regard to the intellectual development of the Empire. He was presented to the Pope, and the honors accorded to him on that occasion form a marked contrast to his treatment at the hands of eminent persons, at home.

He enjoyed, however, the confidence, esteem and affection of a group of noted literati. The greatest minds of his day bowed before him, and it was especially his intimate relations with Moses Mendelssohn which afforded him much pleasure and satisfaction. The two men reciprocally influenced each other, and it is not too much to say that each owes to the other the impetus which has made them both noble in character and great in achievement.

It is interesting to record Lessing's own estimate of himself, which gives striking evidence of his sincerity and modesty:

"I am neither an actor nor a poet. People have honored me occasionally with the latter title, but it is because they have misunderstood me. The few

dramatic attempts which I have ventured upon do not justify this generosity. Not every one who takes a brush in his hand and dabbles in colors is a painter. The earliest of these attempts of mine were dashed off in those years when desire and dexterity are easily mistaken for genius. If there is anything tolerable in those of a later date, I am conscious that I owe it all to criticism alone. I do not feel in myself that living fountain that rises by its own strength, and by its own force shoots up in jets so rich, so fresh, so pure! I am obliged to press it all up out of myself with forcing-pump and pipes. I should be so poor, so cold, and so short-sighted if I had not learned in some measure modestly to borrow foreign treasures, to warm myself at another's fire, and to strengthen my sight with the lenses of art. I have therefore always been ashamed and vexed when I have read or heard anything derogatory to criticism. Criticism, it is said, stifles genius; whereas I flatter myself I have received from it something very nearly akin to genius. I am a lame man, who cannot be edified by a lampoon against crutches."

In reviewing the life of this man, so rich in varied talents, so purposeful and resolute in the attainment of the highest good, by means of truth, one is reminded of the utterance of Heine, a kindred spirit, whose place in German literature is assured and whose life, in some respects, affords an interesting parallel to Lessing's:

"If ye will do me honor, lay a sword upon my coffin, for I was an intrepid soldier in the war of the liberation of humanity."

INTRODUCTION

I.

GENESIS OF THE POEM

We read in ancient legends of giants who devoted their lives to freeing prisoners of their fetters. Lessing was such a savior of the German spirit. He searched through venerable books to discover men who were wronged or misunderstood and restored them to their proper place in history. He sought to liberate the genius of his people from prejudice; its literature from slavish dependence upon French influence; its theology from the uncritical worship of the letter of the law; its national consciousness from the trammels of superstition. *He was the first free-thinker in Germany.*

The Jewish historian, Graetz, says: "With his gigantic mind, Lessing burst through all bonds and regulations which degenerate taste, dry-as-dust-science, haughty orthodoxy and pedantry of every kind had desired to set up and perpetuate. The freedom that Lessing brought to the Germans was more solid and permanent than that which Voltaire aroused in depraved French society, with his biting sarcasm; for his purpose was to ennoble, and his wit was only a means to this end. Lessing wished to exalt the

theatre to a pulpit, and art to a religion. Voltaire degraded philosophy into light gossip for the drawing-room."

While Lessing was a skilful apologist, on behalf of those whose reputation he defended, he was also a redoubtable polemist. Indeed, at one time in his career, controversy was as breath to his nostrils. He was as much at home in the mazes of doctrinal subtlety as in the domain of art, criticism and philosophy. His keen, incisive logic, his caustic satire (always devoid of malice); his trenchant style, were weapons which confounded his foes and brought consternation to a whole school of casuists. No one could long endure the withering cross-fire of his argument, and, in all the battles of the spirit, he came off an easy victor.

The years between the publication of "Emilia Galotti" and "Nathan the Wise" were eventful and strenuous ones for Lessing. They embraced those famous theological disputations which became the solace and pride of his liberal followers. The most notable of these writings were the "Wolfenbüttel Fragments" (begun in 1774) and the series of learned philippics against Melchior Goeze, the pastor of Hamburg. In these papers, which bear the title "Anti-Goeze", as well as in numerous other essays, he employed against orthodox Christianity all the resources of his inexorable logic and linguistic talent; but true enlightenment and religious tolerance were never wanting in his thought. It was this element which made his plea so significant and effective, and won him so many

ardent adherents. Unfortunately, he was not altogether free to express his ideas. In 1778, when the controversy with the fanatical zealot, Goeze, was at its height, he was restrained, by government censorship, from continuing the conflict. He protested in vain, but did not allow himself to be swerved from his purpose. Compelled to lay down his arms, he soon found, in the arsenal of his poetic imagination, another choice of weapons and gave the struggle a new and wholly unexpected turn.

On the 11th of August, 1778, he wrote to his brother Carl: " . . . Many years ago, I sketched a play, the contents of which are somewhat analogous to my present controversies, though I had not yet then dreamt of them. If you and Moses [Mendelssohn] think well of it, I shall have the thing printed by subscription . . . Of course, I would not like to have the actual character of the piece made public too soon; nevertheless, if you or Moses are disposed to know, consult Boccaccio's *Decamerone, Giornata I, Nov. III, Melchisedech Giudeo.* I believe to have discovered a very absorbing episode, which makes good reading and will certainly enable me to play a far more vexatious prank on the theologians than I could with yet ten more 'Fragments' ". A few weeks later, he wrote to one of his friends, Elisa Reimarus: "I am curious to see whether they will let me preach without interference from my old pulpit —the theatre."

Accordingly, he mounted the pulpit and proclaimed to the world his canticle of tolerance, the gospel of

brotherly love, the immortal epic, "Nathan the Wise".

Amid disappointments and annoyances of every description; distracted by the death of his wife, which left him lonely and desolate; and incessantly attacked and maligned by his clerical foe, he completed the poem. The first rough draft was finished early in November, 1776. On the 19th, according to a notice discovered among his papers, he began the versification of the first act; and in May, 1779, the printed work was delivered to the subscribers.

The poet chose English blank verse as the most suitable and dignified vehicle of dramatic expression. "To finish it quickly", he wrote, on December 16, 1778, "I am composing it in verse, not in rhymed meter, however, for this would be altogether too unrhymed." He had already written to his brother, on December 7th: "If I have not already told you that the piece is to be in verse, you will, no doubt, wonder to find it so. Do not give yourself unnecessary concern because of this, believing that the work will be delayed. My prose has invariably cost me more time than my verse." In another letter to a friend, we read: " . . . I chose the verse form not for the sake of euphony, but because the oriental tone, which I must accentuate, here and there, would seem awkward and conspicuous in prose . . . "

Thus, Lessing was the first author in Germany to use the iambic pentameter, and the noble, stately diction of his "Nathan" served as a model for all subsequent writers of tragedy. It is a didactic poem, conceived in an altogether new vein and wholly in-

dependent of the established canons of dramatic art. It is a *tendenzschrift,* full of majestic thought. With the possible exception of Goethe's "Faust", we know of few similar compositions from which so many memorable sentences may be culled. Indeed, in tone, dignity, elegance of diction and profound sincerity, it may be said to hold equal rank with it, in the estimation of critics of literature. The author himself was well aware of the difficulty of treating so exalted a theme in dramatic form. "If it should be said," he remarks in an early sketch of his Preface, "that a piece of such peculiar tendency is not rich enough in intrinsic beauty, I will keep silent, but not feel ashamed. I am conscious of the goal which lies before me and have no doubt that one can acquit one's self with honor in pursuing this path."

It is certainly remarkable that he should have been able to invest a didactic theme with such vividness and sympathy as to awaken a profound emotional response in the heart of his audience, whenever presented on the stage. The characters of the play, although they typify certain definite ideas which he wished to convey, are not abstractions, as in an allegory, but possess truth, individuality and intense dramatic power. Here, as in "Emilia Galotti", we see the action of the play develop as a natural and logical necessity.

The poet's own conception of his task is clearly stated in his Preface:

"If it should be said that this piece teaches, that it is not only since yesterday that people of all nations

make light of revealed religion and yet are known to be estimable persons; and when it is further noted that I have quite clearly designed to show such people in a less repulsive light than they are accustomed to be regarded by the ordinary Christian rabble,—I should not have very much objection to such a view, for a man may teach both and yet not reject all revealed religion. I am not sly enough to represent myself as such a man, yet I am bold enough not to dissemble my opinions. But, if it should be said that I have offended against poetic good taste, and that it is inconceivable that such characters should have lived among Jews and Mussulmen, I will have it known that the Jews and Mussulmen were the only learned men at that time; that the detriment which revealed religions bring to mankind must have been at no time more striking to a rational being than at the period of the Crusades; and that historical proofs are not wanting to demonstrate the fact that such an enlightened individual actually existed in the person of a Sultan. . . . . .

I know as yet of no locality in Germany where this play could be produced, but all hail to the place where it will first see the light of day!"

Kuno Fischer, the eminent German critic, whose essay on "Nathan the Wise" gives perhaps the most exhaustive analysis of the drama (an English version is printed, in part, in the Appendix to Miss Ellen Frothingham's translation, published in New York, in 1867), indulges in considerable sophistry in pointing out the strong antithesis between the character of

Nathan and Shylock, forgetting, for the moment, that, in reality, Shakespeare's creation, as has been definitely proven, was a Christian and not a Jew. In this connection, another great writer demands to know whether Lessing could have found a Christian hero who would rear an orphan child, committed to his care, free from the trammels of creed. Only a Jew could have pursued such a course, for proselytizing is foreign to his nature, and he is inherently broad in his religious principles. Thus, the main motive of the drama is fully justified.

In accounting for the fact that Nathan is made the hero, Kuno Fischer has this to say: "Take, now, a religion by nature intolerant and proud, the proudest, the most oppressed of all the religions of the world. Imagine a man permitted by his religion to esteem himself the chosen of God, but condemned by the world, despised and rejected of men. If his soul yields to this two-fold pressure, and follows the natural course of human passions, it must be consumed by hatred and revenge. There must be kindled a thirst for vengeance, so demoniacal, so beastly in beastly natures, that it would tear the pound of flesh from an enemy's heart, if only to bait a hook with it. Yet, when these passions, which in their worst and lowest forms make a Shylock, are conquered by a noble soul—when toleration is wrested from a religion at once the proudest and most oppressed, we have a Nathan. He will not now, indeed, narrowly represent his religion; but toleration would not cost what it does, if he did not prize his religion and were not in

sympathy with it. He still feels it to be his religion, the faith of his people and his fathers—the faith to which he is linked by a thousand indissoluble ties. He does not represent Judaism, but he is and remains a Jew—not because Judaism is a tolerant religion, but because it is the reverse . . . "

While the critic accepts the theory that Lessing, in his hero, depicted his friend, Mendelssohn, he seems to be unwilling to recognize in the great philosopher those shining qualities which Lessing so deeply admired in his Jewish friend. To him, as to many others, such a Jew, in the flesh, would be almost an anomaly, and it is for this reason that we are constrained to turn our attention to the relations which existed between the two friends.

It might be pointed out, in passing, that the poet unconsciously adverted to a historical fact when he made Nathan a power at the court of Saladin. In the Middle Ages, Jews engaged in the learned professions were frequently to be found in the entourage of their royal masters. Thus, to mention but a few, Dunash Ibn Tamim was court physician about the year 950; Abu Mansur (flourished 1125), and Ibn Firkah were physicians of the Caliph Al-Hafiz; Nathanael Israeli, the Egyptian (about 1150), served in the same capacity to the last Fatimite Caliph of Egypt and to the great Saladin. Abu al-Bayyan al-Mudavvar (died 1184) and Abu al-Ma'ali, brother-in-law of Maimonides, were likewise in the service of that illustrious monarch. Moses Maimonides himself (1135 to 1205), the greatest thinker among the Jews, was devoted

particularly to the study of medicine, in which he distinguished himself to such a degree that "the King of the Franks in Ascalon," who is said to be identical with King Richard I of England (Coeur de Lion), wanted to appoint him as his physician, and became so eminent in his profession that Alfadhel, Vizier of Saladin, bestowed upon him many distinctions. The name of Maimonides was entered on the roll of physicians; he received a pension and was introduced to the court of Saladin. In a letter written to another learned Jew of his time, he says:

"I reside in Egypt; the King resides in Cairo, which lies about two Sabbath-day journeys from the first-named place. My duties to the King are very heavy. I am obliged to visit him every day, early in the morning; and when he or any of his children, or the inmates of his harem, are indisposed, I dare not quit Cairo, but must stay, during the greater part of the day in the palace. It also frequently happens that one or two of the royal officers fall sick, and then I have to attend them. As a rule, I go to Cairo very early in the day, and, even if nothing unusual happens, I do not return before the afternoon, when I am almost dead with hunger; but I find the antechambers filled with Jews and Gentiles, with nobles and common people, awaiting my return . . . "

From the last part of this letter, it may be deduced that Saladin was indeed an enlightened prince, to whom people of all races and religions had ready access. He allowed the Jews to settle in Jerusalem; accorded them full protection, as he did to all aliens,

even his enemies; and the Jews rose to great power and distinction, under his rule. The testimony of the great Jewish philosopher is, therefore, sufficient to vindicate Lessing's portraiture of Saladin.

If this proof be inadequate, one has but to consider, in the light of history, the intimate relations between the poet and the man who is sometimes described by Christian writers as the "Jewish Socrates", in order to establish the fact that the picture we have of him, in Nathan, is faithful to life in every detail and that Lessing did not have to draw upon his imagination to present so lofty and ideal a character.

MOSES MENDELSSOHN

(From a rare engraving by Prof. J. G. Müller, Stuttgart, 1786)

II.

LESSING AND MENDELSSOHN

Moses Mendelssohn, deformed and unprepossessing in appearance, like Aesop; puny in stature and weak in body, was undoubtedly one of the greatest intellects in his day. Reared in poverty, and occupied, day and night, in the study of the Jewish Law, he overcame not only his natural limitations, but the civic and social disabilities under which his co-religionists suffered. Risen from the ranks, and unaided, save by his own exalted ideals and singular attainments, he soon enjoyed the protection of Frederick the Great, who accorded him special honors and made him a "Court Jew." He thus affords a striking parallel to Nathan in the drama. His elevation to fame left him simple, modest and unassuming, and he used whatever power and influence he had to ameliorate the condition of his downtrodden people. Staunch in his convictions; resolute in character; brave and dauntless, as the Jew in Lessing's epic, he broke a lance with the great Emperor on many an occasion, fearlessly discussing weighty problems with him and venturing so far as to criticize his royal master. How closely this intrepid philosopher resembles the gentle, astute, magnanimous Jew in Lessing's story! He was, in spirit and in flesh, the prototype of the poet's creation.

From the Middle Ages, when the Jew was supreme in national culture and in the wide range of his attainments, to the early decades of the 18th century, when he lapsed into degradation and self-sufficiency, is a long cry. It was reserved for Mendelssohn (born December 6, 1729; died January 4, 1784) to analyze and interpret this condition. "My people have sunk to such a low cultural level," writes he, "that one despairs of the possibility of effecting a change for the better." But this pessimistic conviction and prophecy did not deter him from removing the spiritual fetters of his people and awakening in them a love for the beautiful, the true and the good. A stammering cripple, outwardly repulsive, but cherishing high ideals and harboring a lofty soul, he was able, by his genius, discernment, sympathy and understanding, to emancipate his nation from the physical and spiritual thraldom in which it lived. And when we know the full story of his achievements, his unhandsome exterior is soon forgotten. His dwarfed body takes on a giant's stature, and we behold in him a second Moses, leading his benighted and enslaved people from the darkness into the light.

The Renaissance of the Jews was brought about by no conscious effort on his part; indeed, he doubted that it could be effected at all. Timid and diffident by nature, he shunned all publicity and did not make himself felt by engaging in any active propaganda on behalf of his race. Even when he was called upon to lead, he declined to serve, modestly disclaiming any qualification for such a task. But, without

knowing it himself, he exerted a potent influence upon the regeneration of the Jewish people. He unwittingly aroused the dormant recuperative faculty of the race, which only needed the inspiration of such a personality to enable it to emerge from its low estate and to develop to its fullest power. His biography, therefore, is actually the history of the Jews of modern times. It is the record of their struggle and salvation; of their providential redemption from obscurity and ignominy and their attainment to recognition and self-consciousness.

Though practically self-taught, he was trained in science, as in polite literature, by Jewish teachers, who had, in a measure, emancipated themselves from the prejudices of their time. Maimonides became his intellectual mentor, and he passionately devoted himself to the study of his works. From this source, he derived his keen, penetrating logic, his love for philosophic thought and his lucidity of expression.

By seclusion and self-abnegation, he learned to develop his character. He tamed his wild, hectic temperament until his emotions became subservient to his reason. Indeed, he had become so mild and forbearing that, when, at the zenith of his fame, some insolent students at Königsberg made cruel sport of his natural infirmities, scoffed at his hump and his pointed beard, he remained impassive and retorted amiably: *"I am only waiting to hear Professor Kant's discourse."* In common with his other learned co-religionists, he used the Hebrew language as a vehicle of literary expression, but, in this also, he effected a startling trans-

formation. His was a golden touch. The clumsy, technical, artificial style then in vogue eventually gave way to a clear, easy-flowing and brilliant prose—his own earliest compositions serving as models which have rarely been excelled. His writings were instinct with life and conformed to the modern spirit, which permeated all his work. The conflict between the old and new order of things still stirred within him when the one man came into his life who was to bring him clarity of view, a broader vision and truer self-consciousness.

It was in 1754 that Lessing first became acquainted with the cultured little savant of Berlin, then only 25 years old, "with whose lips", Carlyle tells us, "Socrates spoke like Socrates in German, as in no modern language, for his own character was Socratic"; and of whom Alexander I, the enlightened Czar of Russia, said, in commemorating the emancipation of the Jews of his empire, that his greatest reward would be to produce a Mendelssohn.

It was another Jew, Isaac Hess*, a lover of chess, who brought these kindred spirits together. "The royal game", Graetz aptly observes, "united two monarchs in the domain of thought". And the bond

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* According to the *Jewish Encyclopedia,* VIII, 479 it was Aaron Solomon Gumperz, a wealthy medical student, who introduced Mendelssohn to Lessing as a good chess player. Gumperz taught Mendelssohn French and English, inspired him with a taste for science and philosophy, and was instrumental in bringing him to the attention of Maupertuis, President of the Berlin Academy, and other notables.

was to last through life. The poet's democratic nature knew no distinction. He eagerly sought the company of those who were the despised and rejected of men. He numbered among his friends men of the type of Kant, Abbt, Garve, Reimarus, Kleist, Lavater and others more or less distinguished; but he also deigned to associate with the dreamers of the Ghetto. In his writings he speaks in appreciative terms of several eminent Jewish scholars, who were then struggling for recognition, and he demonstrated, whenever occasion arose, his catholic sympathies.

Already in 1747, seven years before he met Mendelssohn, Lessing had given striking evidence of his broad-mindedness. When his compatriots everywhere scorned them, he took up the cudgels in their defense, by presenting, in his comedy, "The Jew", an Israelite without guile, whose personal integrity and loftiness of character afford an interesting contrast to the type of Christian philistines he describes in the play. A brief synopsis of it may not be out of place:

A Jewish traveler rescues a German nobleman from the murderous assault of robbers and rejects all recompense for his services. He gracefully declines the hand of the Baron's daughter, which was proferred as an expression of gratitude, and, when, to the amazement of the company, he reveals himself as a Jew, he exclaims, with conscious pride, after hearing all manner of abuse heaped upon his race by the people whom he had befriended:

"All the reward I ask is this—that hereafter you may judge my nation more leniently and not condemn

it without a hearing. I disguised my true origin, not because I was ashamed, but because I perceived that you were attached to my person, while you were repelled by my people."

To his own servant, whom he had saved from need and misery, and who blurts out this protest, upon learning that his master is a Jew: "You have offended in me the whole of Christendom by engaging me, instead of entering into my service", he makes this retort: "I cannot credit you with nobler motives than the rest of the Christian rabble". He likewise pays his respects to the Baron, the proud representative of the exclusive set, who, taken off his feet by this unexpected turn of affairs, cries out in admiration: "O how estimable would be the Jews, if they all resembled you!" To which the Jew replies: "And how estimable would be the Christians, if they all had your fine qualities!"

It must have afforded the author great satisfaction to have created an ideal Jewish character long before he had come into actual contact with Mendelssohn, who justified to the world the accuracy of the fanciful portrait he had drawn in this comedy, written in his eighteenth year.

As might have been expected, this youthful performance provoked considerable criticism. One reviewer, comparing it with Gellert's "Swedish Countess", which also exalts the Jewish character, maintains that, while it is possible that such a noble type exists among the Jews, it is altogether improbable that he is anything but a rare exception, since the race is given to trading

and has more opportunities and temptations for crooked dealing than people in other professions. In examining this sweeping assertion, Lessing has this to say, in a special article, written seven years after the publication of the play:

"My antagonist declares that such a Jew cannot be true to life, because he lives amid degradation and oppression and is obliged to subsist solely by trade. Granted; but, does it necessarily follow that the improbability is not eliminated if these adverse circumstances are changed? But when can this come to pass? Undoubtedly, only when the Jew begins to feel the scorn and obloquy of the Christians in a lesser degree and is not constrained to eke out a wretched existence in petty, despicable barter. What then becomes the next requisite? Affluence? O yes, the right use of riches is also of prime importance. It should be observed that both of these conditions are met in the character of my Jew in the comedy. He is wealthy; he himself declares that the God of his fathers had given him more than he needed; I make him a traveler; I undertake to shield him from natural imputations of ignorance; he is a reader, who is not without books even on his journeys. If then you ask whether it can actually be true that my Jew should have educated himself; and insist that wealth, a more fortunate experience, and an enlightened mind, cannot effect a salutary change in a Jew, I must reply that it is this very prejudice which I have attempted to combat in my comedy—a prejudice which can flow only from hatred and pride and makes the Jew not only a boor, but a

pariah of mankind. If my co-religionists cannot overcome this prejudice, I dare not flatter myself that my piece will ever be graciously received. Would I then be able to persuade them to give every Jew credit for probity and magnanimity, or, at least, to attribute these qualities to most of them? Let me say quite plainly: even if my traveler were a Christian, his would be a singularly rare character, and, if rareness constitutes an improbability, then it would be improbable indeed."

Abruptly discontinuing the vindication of his point of view with the remark that one ought to strive to know deserving Jews more intimately and cease to rail against them, because the type that is usually in evidence at the annual fair is repugnant to the cultured, Lessing declares that he prefers to set forth the testimony of one "who is as witty as he is learned and upright and whom he knows too well to deny him an audience". He suspects that the letter which he subjoins from this source will be considered an invention on his part and begs the reader to convince himself of its authenticity.

This remarkable document, we are told, was anonymously addressed by its author to another Jewish friend, who, Lessing adds, is "wholly akin to him in noble attributes". It is needless to say that this unnamed scribe is Mendelssohn, who directed an impassioned protest against Michaelis, the reviewer of the play, to his erstwhile teacher, Doctor Gumperz, a learned physician and authority in mathematics, acting, at the time, as private secretary to Maupertuis, the academician.

This information is furnished by Karl Lessing, the poet's brother, who, as the biographer and annotator of his works, was in a position to know all the details of his life. In the course of his dignified, but indignant rejoinder, Mendelssohn bitterly denounces the view that the Jew in Lessing's play should be deemed a fanciful exaggeration and not the characterization of an existing type. One would expect, says he, more honesty and forbearance from scholars who are so punctilious in their own demands, but are themselves quite devoid of fairness and sweet reasonableness.

"How sadly I have erred in my hope to be meted out that justice by Christian writers which they exact from others!"

"Verily", he continues, "how dare a man, with a spark of integrity in his soul, assert that there is not a single upright individual to be found in a whole nation! A race from which Lessing boasts that all the prophets and the greatest kings have sprung! Is this cruel judgment justifiable? If so, what a disgrace for humanity; if unjustifiable, what a disgrace for him who makes the charge! Is it not enough that we must suffer Christian hatred in so many cruel ways; shall such injustice be still further fortified by calumny? Let them persist in their persecutions; let them keep us isolated in a commonwealth of free and happy citizens; yea, let them expose us to the scorn and derision of the entire world; but our virtue, the solace of all stricken souls, the only refuge of the utterly forsaken, they shall not venture to take away from us!"

He continues in this strain at some length, vindicating with fiery eloquence the innate decency and morality of his race, whose ethical precepts and domestic qualities are too universally recognized to require a defence; and concludes by saying that he pities the person "who can read such an arraignment of an entire people without a shudder".

Lessing finally adds, by way of postscript to this protest, that he has also the reply to it before him, written in some heat by the erudite physician, to whom it is addressed, and that he can assure the public that "both correspondents have contrived to acquire enough virtue and wisdom *without riches*" and that he is convinced that "they would have more followers among their own people if only good Christians suffered them to emerge from their obscurity and permitted them to hold up their heads a little higher".

Seven years had passed since the young poet's comedy appeared, in which he strove to reinstate the much-despised Jew in the estimation of his compatriots. His ideals and aspirations had kept pace with his unfolding genius, and his spiritual development was further enhanced by the loyal friendship of two men with whom he came in close personal contact during his second sojourn in Berlin. These men were Friedrich Nicolai, a youthful bookseller, who had already won his spurs in literature, and Moses Mendelssohn, the philosopher, then still unknown, of about the same age as Lessing, employed in a silk factory. The three men were uncommonly congenial. Mendelssohn's special knowledge of English literature,

in which the others were deeply interested, proved to be the bond which united them in literary and social fellowship. In addition to these, Lessing's intimate circle of friends included Professor Sulzer and Ramler, the celebrated writer of odes.

In character and attainments, Lessing and Mendelssohn were singularly alike; yet each, in his excessive modesty, admired in the other the very qualities which distinguished both. Mendelssohn was attracted to Lessing by reason of his broad culture, his brilliancy and daring, his freedom from all restraint, and a certain brotherly sympathy which cheered and warmed his heart. He once declared that a genial glance from his eye had the effect of banishing all anxiety and sorrow.

What Lessing, on the other hand, cherished most in his Jewish friend, was his great strength of character, the roots of which lay in his ethical consciousness; his eager quest of truth and his loftiness of thought. They reciprocally influenced each other's destiny. Lessing saw in Mendelssohn "a second Spinoza, who would do honor to his nation". He inspired in him a profound interest in aesthetics, poetry and art, and was amply compensated by the stimulus for philosophic thought he received from Mendelssohn. Thus the bond of amity between them became closer and closer, lasting not only through life, but even beyond the grave.

"It may be said, without exaggeration, that Lessing's influence was greater in ennobling the Jewish race than in elevating the German people, due to the

fact that the Jews were more eager for study and more susceptible to culture. All that Mendelssohn gained by intercourse with his friend benefited Judaism. . . . . Mendelssohn was introduced into his circle, learned the amenities of society and threw off the awkwardness which was the stamp of the Ghetto."

That Lessing did this for his friend is proof of his nobility of heart; that Mendelssohn availed himself of the opportunities thus presented redounded to his everlasting glory, for, in entering this new, strange world of men and ideas, he unquestionably created a memorable epoch in Jewish history. He accomplished the spiritual and intellectual emancipation of his people. It heartens one, even to-day, to read how wisely and gently he bore himself in his own domestic life, as well as in select society; how everybody deferred to him, bowed to his decision and paid him respectful homage. No personage of worth visited Berlin without doing him reverence, after he had reached the zenith of his fame and his exemplary virtues as man and thinker had come to be universally recognized.

Mendelssohn's greatest merit was his complete mastery of German style, which was the direct result of his association with his Christian compatriots. It required courage to challenge the established traditions of the Ghetto. To read a German book was regarded a heresy, in his day. He could recall an episode in his boyhood when one of his co-religionists was expelled from Berlin for such an offense. That was in the

early forties of the eighteenth century. Ten years later appeared Mendelssohn's maiden effort in German. He learned to write the language with considerable difficulty, but he soon acquired a perfection of style seldom attained by any one of his contemporaries. He wrote as he spoke, placidly and distinctly, without artifice or striving after effect. Everyone could follow his thought, however subtle, and realized that a new star had risen in the literary firmament.

The Jews too understood him. He had cast a spell on Berlin, on Germany—the spell of redemption. A far-reaching Reformation set in, such as Judaism in all its centuries of wandering had seldom experienced. History teaches that a spiritual renaissance is frequently brought about by some distinctive literary achievement. What Ulfilas, the Goth, Luther, the rugged German, and Wycliffe, the Briton, had accomplished for humanity by their respective Bible translations, Mendelssohn wrought for his despised race, by his epoch-making version of the Pentateuch and the Psalms, in the German vernacular. It had all the beauty, dignity and strength of the Hebrew original and initiated the Jews in Germany, Austria, Russia and Poland in the study of correct and graceful German style. Written for the benefit of his own children, it became the instrument of Jewish emancipation. It remains a national classic—a spiritual heritage for all times.

As the first result of his researches in English literature, Lessing wrote, in collaboration with Mendelssohn, an anonymous, satirical treatise, entitled "Pope

as a Metaphysician", called forth by a prize offered by the Berlin Academy. In this essay, published in 1755, the authors zealously defend the teachings of Leibnitz. Mendelssohn was an enthusiastic disciple of his school of philosophy, and, though decidedly antagonistic to Spinoza's pantheistic doctrines, entered the lists on his behalf in another anonymous work, entitled "Philosophic Dialogues", which appeared in the same year. With the exception of the masterly letter to Gumperz, which he had written in answer to Lessing's anti-Jewish critics, and from which we have given extracts, this was his first literary production in German. One day, the frank and boyish Lessing came with a laugh to Mendelssohn's desk, in the counting-room, holding in his hand a volume fresh from printer and binder. To the amazement of Mendelssohn, it was a manuscript of his own, which he had modestly withheld from the press. His friend, however, had taken it without his knowledge and was spreading it far and wide in an ample edition. Its success was so marked, that he became henceforth a prolific and versatile bookman. Lessing, therefore, enjoys the distinction of having introduced Mendelssohn into the world of letters.

The true authorship of the essay on Pope could not long remain hidden. It is significant that Mendelssohn would not agree to be named as collaborator, preferring to let Lessing reap all the honors (see Lessing's letter to Mendelssohn of February 18, 1755). However, the facts soon became known, and the youthful philosopher was enthusiastically hailed by

the Academicians. In court circles too, they wished to know "the young Hebrew who wrote in German". The purity of his style, his gift for popular presentation of abstract themes, and, above all, his evident sincerity, captivated not only German readers, but all lovers of philosophy and literature. Among those who appreciated him was Kant, the greatest thinker of modern times, who called him a genius, "destined to create a new epoch in metaphysics and to establish an altogether new norm of criticism". In a letter to Dr. Marcus Herz, the well-known physician—who gave lectures on the philosophy of Kant, which were attended by all the notables of the city, including the princes of royal blood, and whose beautiful wife is remembered for the part she played in the social and literary life of the great metropolis—the famous author of the "Critique of Pure Reason" writes as follows: "While it is not altogether desirable that all writers should have a peculiar style, any more than that all trees should bear a distinctive bark; nevertheless, Mendelssohn's manner of expressing himself appears to me to be the most suitable for philosophic discourse. It is so free from all passion for dazzling ornament and yet so elegant; so sagacious and yet so clear; so penetrating, though it makes no visible effort to stir the emotions at all. If the Muses should give Philosophy a tongue, it would speak his language."

This is high praise indeed, coming from such a source, especially when one considers that Mendelssohn had been awarded the prize by the Berlin Academy, about fifteen years before the above-quoted

lines were written, for his essay on "The Mathematical Method in Philosophic Reasoning", defeating Kant in the contest, entirely on account of his lucid and attractive style. It was his endeavor to perfect himself in German, and he applied himself to this task with a devotion almost equal to his love for Hebrew lore. And the result justified his expectations, for his contributions to aesthetics, philosophy and literature were looked upon as classics in the language by his countrymen, although the critics of a later day were more grudging in their estimate. His "Phaedo or The Immortality of the Soul" won extraordinary popularity in Berlin, as much for its literary charm as for its spiritual message. It is a work of rare beauty, which, more than any of his writings, established his fame as a profound and original thinker.

In this book Mendelssohn translated the dialogue of Plato, of the same name, enlarging and developing the argument in the spirit of later philosophy. As an introduction to the work, a picture of the life and character of Socrates was given, full of the highest love and veneration for the master-sage. The tone of Mendelssohn's "Phaedo" is most exalted and soon challenged the admiration of the world. Edition followed edition; it was translated into most European languages, as also into Hebrew and Judaeo-German. Inasmuch as so many thinkers of his day have clothed their speculations with an obscure and technical style, which renders them inaccessible except to minds of exceptional power of penetration, it is worth while to speak of the admirable clearness and grace of Men-

delssohn's method of presentation. The work is a series of the sublimest thoughts, fitly framed, pervaded with the broadest and noblest spirit.

As he was a typical German in his literary style, so pronounced were his political ideas and his rugged patriotism. He was not only one of the best prose writers of the land, but ranged himself on the side of the greatest leaders in citizenship. He seized every opportunity to emphasize the fact that a Jew was, above all things, a German and servant of the State. In his "Philosophic Dialogues", for example, he rebukes the Germans for ignoring their own spiritual heritage and permitting themselves to fall under the yoke of French supremacy in the arts. "Will the Germans", he exclaims, "never realize their own intrinsic worth? Will they forever exchange their pure gold for the tinsel of their neighbors?" In a review of Zimmermann's treatise on "National Pride" and Abbt's book on "Dying for the Fatherland", he gives striking evidence of his matchless patriotism and his devotion to his native Germany. One is tempted to quote at length from these memorable utterances, but the following will suffice:

"Why is it that ancient history is always more interesting than modern history, although the latter is so much nearer to our own times? One of the most important reasons, no doubt, is this—that, with the Greeks and Romans, the whole nation was animated by one mode of thought; the love for the Fatherland was at the root of all their world-struggles; it was the battle-cry of their bloody wars and the sinew of

all their negotiations. The historian saw in this dominant mode of thought a wide field for the expansion of its genius, for he described not only deeds but the ideas and convictions of entire nations as well. In our own times, however, the nations have scarcely any mode of thought. The love for the Fatherland has been repudiated, together with other prejudices, and should this love for the Fatherland once again inspire the hearts of our fellow citizens, the nation must of necessity adopt a new mode of thought, rejuvenated as it will be by a new spirit. Its achievements in the service of the King will then have more natural motive power than obedience; more love than mere attachment to the soil. Once the nation receives a new impetus from its love for the Fatherland, it naturally follows that all activities of the citizens become more and more ennobled, so as to conform to this new mode of thought."

It will be seen from this and similar sentiments, scattered throughout his works, that Mendelssohn was a true patriot. Indeed, in Germany, as elsewhere, the Jew has always proven himself to be the most loyal and representative citizen. It must have caused him great personal sorrow to note the misery of his co-religionists, who were deprived of all civic rights and privileges. They were exposed to the meanest insults of the mob, whenever they ventured on the street. As late as the year 1780, he wrote, in the following bitter strain to a personal friend, a Benedictine brother: "Everywhere, in this so-called tolerant land, I live so isolated through real intolerance, so beset on every

side, that, out of love for my own children, I lock myself up in a silk factory, as in a cloister. Of an evening, I take a walk with my wife and children. 'Father,' asks one of the innocents, 'what does that fellow yell after us? Why do they pelt us with stones? What have we done to them?' 'Yes, dear father,' says another, 'they follow us constantly on the streets and sneeringly cry "Jews! Jews!" Do these people then think it is a disgrace to be a Jew? And what does it matter to them?' . . . . . Ah, I close my eyes, stifle a sigh inwardly and exclaim: 'Poor humanity! You have indeed brought things to a sorry pass!'"

Although taking no active part in wordly affairs, sedulously avoiding the task of leadership, which would have plunged him into bitter wrangles, he did not fail to respond to any call which demanded the weight of his authority and influence, in the defence of the liberties of his own people. For example, when fresh measures were taken, in Switzerland, in 1774, to restrict Jewish marriages, he successfully pleaded on their behalf. Another time, when, according to a new edict, promulgated in Saxony on September 15, 1772, a large number of impoverished Jewish families were to be expelled, his energetic intercession with an eminent statesman, who was his personal friend, happily warded off the threatened calamity. A Bohemian Talmudist, in Saxony, was imprisoned, on the strength of false testimony, and an open letter from the pen of Mendelssohn set him free. The Jews of Poland laid their grievances before him when, weighed down by all manner of accusations, their very existence was placed in jeopardy.

It was due chiefly to his strenuous efforts that the dignity of divine service was maintained and that his coreligionists were not molested by offensive interference during the hours of prayer. A professor of Königsberg, who was the government supervisor of the synagogues in that city, had denounced a certain prayer in the ritual, in a report to the Ministry, on April 5, 1777. On the request of the congregational leaders, Mendelssohn prepared a brief, which proved so effective that Frederick the Great forthwith abolished all government censorship of divine worship, which offended and degraded the sanctity of the synagogue.

By special imperial privilege, Mendelssohn enjoyed the protection of the court and bore the title of "Schutz-Jude" from the year 1763 on. He had the temerity to issue the first plea for tolerance and for the complete enfranchisement of his Jewish brethren. His views were voiced in a work which ranks as perhaps the most valuable document of its kind in literature. He called it "Jerusalem" and it contains the most momentous utterances that have ever emanated from a Jewish pen. The great philosopher Kant congratulated him on this performance, in a letter dated August 16, 1773, in the following words:

"With what admiration I have read your 'Jerusalem'! I regard this book as the announcement of a great, though slow-coming reform, which will affect not only your nation, but also others. You have managed to unite with your religion such a spirit of freedom and tolerance as it has not had credit for and such as no other faith can boast. You have so

powerfully presented the necessity of an unlimited liberty of conscience, for every faith, that, at length, on our side too, the church must do some serious thinking. The Christians must study whether in their creeds there are not things which burden and oppress the spirit and look toward a union which, as regards essential religious points, shall bring all of us together."

As many of his major works, this memorable human document was also translated in English. We possess several versions of it, notably one from the pen of Rabbi Isaac Lesser, of Philadelphia. It has not lost its potency even to this day, and it would be well if it were more extensively circulated among our Jewish as well as Christian brethren. We content ourselves in quoting one single paragraph, which conveys the general drift of his argument:

"Why should you condemn us for doing that which the founder of your religion himself has done and confirmed by his authority? Will you withhold from us civic fellowship and brotherly love, because we differ from you in our ceremonial laws, but do not eat with you, do not marry with you,—when, so far as we can perceive, the founder of your religion had done the self-same thing and would, indeed, not have permitted us to act otherwise? If this is and should remain your true conviction, and civic equality may not be acquired under any other condition than that we violate our statutes, which we still consider binding, then it pains us to be obliged to declare: that we must dispense with civic equality. Then Dohm, the

great friend of mankind, has labored in vain, and everything must continue in the same pitiful state that it is to-day. . . . . It is not up to us to yield, but it is incumbent upon us, if we are honest and upright, to show you brotherly love, notwithstanding, and to appeal to you, in brotherly love, to mitigate our lot and to make our burdens as bearable as possible. If you will not look upon us as brothers and fellow-citizens, consider us, at least, as fellow-men and denizens of a common country. Show us ways and means how to become better burghers and suffer us, so far as time and circumstances permit, to enjoy the primitive rights of mankind. We cannot, in conscience, deviate from our laws, and of what use are fellow-citizens without a conscience?"

Another opportunity to serve his co-religionists arose when a noted representative of the Jews in Alsace turned to him with the request to prepare a memoir, wherein the intolerable condition of the Jews in that province should be set forth. Instead of drafting such a document, he persuaded an eminent statesman and jurist to undertake the task. In the person of Christian Wilhelm von Dohm (born December 11, 1741; died May 29, 1829), the Jews found a powerful spokesman and champion. With the help of Mendelssohn, he composed a book on the "Civic Amelioration of the Jews", which is not only the first work of this character, but remains the most valuable and important contribution to the history of Jewish emancipation. The author did yeoman service for the Jews of Germany, in vindicating their rights and

privileges and redeeming them from slavery and dishonor. His appeal had, in a sense, the same effect on the nation's sense of justice that Lessing's "Nathan" had upon the literary world, with its magnificent plea for universal tolerance. Not since the days of the great Reformation, when John Reuchlin raised his powerful voice on behalf of the Jewish race, whose language and literature he studied and admired so sincerely, had such a cry for justice been heard in German lands.

"The anti-Jewish policy of the present day", he pleaded, "is a reminder of the barbarism of bygone centuries, a result of fanatical religious hatred, unworthy of the enlightenment of modern times, which civilization should have long since rooted out. . . . . Every citizen who observes the law and contributes, by his industry, to the welfare of the commonwealth, should be welcomed by the State. . . . . The Jew also has a righteous claim to the full enjoyment of civic privileges and a common fellowship. His religion does not render him unworthy of it, inasmuch as he can be a very good citizen, even if he strictly follows the mandates of his traditions. . . . . I even venture to congratulate the State which carries out these principles; it will create, by its own resources, new, loyal and grateful subjects; it will make good citizens of its native Jews."

Dohm's work caused the greatest sensation throughout Germany. His stirring appeal reached the thrifty Jewish colony in Surinam, Dutch Guiana, and we owe a history of that interesting community entirely to

his inspiration. That a man of his high social and official standing, a noted statesman, privy-councilor of war, should have dared to demand emancipation for the friendless outcasts of the Ghetto, in such strenuous and ruthless fashion, was an unprecedented move. As might have been expected, coals of fire were heaped upon his head by the publication of a whole series of rejoinders, full of malice and vituperation, which strove to nullify his arguments by recourse to mediaevil slanders and prejudices. The controversy raged with such violence that Mendelssohn was again constrained to enter the lists with his pen. He added "Notes" to the second volume of Dohm's work, which definitely disposed of all criticisms and objections, and wrote an exhaustive *Preface,* in his matchless style, to the translation of Menasseh ben Israel's "Vindication of the Jews", first issued in 1656, which Dr. Marcus Herz rendered into graceful German.

This "Preface" was energetically assailed in periodicals and pamphlets; and it is in final rebuttal that he composed his celebrated work "Jerusalem, or Concerning Religious Power and Judaism", in 1783. Although his opponents decried its author as a rationalist and even an atheist, and the Jews were little more pleased—since, on the one hand, he recognized the basic principle of Judaism to be freedom of thought and belief, and, on the other, placed its whole essence in the ceremonial law—both the Orthodox party and the Reformers claimed him as their own. What Kant regarded as an "irrefutable book", because

it expressed great truths which no one had yet dared to voice so unequivocally, a large majority denounced as mere sophistry. It is noteworthy, however, that he was the first German Jew to preach the gospel of brotherhood, as the following passage from his "Jerusalem" indicates:

"Thank the God of your fathers; thank God, who is love and compassion itself, that the delusion is gradually losing ground that religion can maintain itself only by iron might, propagate its doctrine of salvation only through unholy persecution and spread the conception of God, which all confessions maintain is love, only by means of hatred. Nations tolerate and bear with one another and will look leniently even upon you, who may yet, under a gracious Providence, which links the hearts of men, reap the comforts of brotherly love. *O, my brothers, follow the example of love, as ye have hitherto followed the example of hatred. Imitate the virtues of those nations whose vices you have thought it needful to copy. If ye will be cherished, tolerated and spared by others, cherish, tolerate and spare each other! Love ye, so will ye too be loved!*"

As the jargon his co-religionists spoke was the dividing wall between Jews and Christians, so the language of their common country proved to be the effective instrument wherewith to raze it. The Seven Years' War awakened the dormant patriotism of the Prussians, so that the celebration of victories became no irksome joy. Mendelssohn joined his fellow-citizens in these festivities by composing patriotic

verse and a series of sermons in honor of the glorious feat of arms at Rossbach, Leuten and Hubertsburg. These were preached in the synagogue in Berlin, by his old teacher, Rabbi Frankel, and at least two of them have been translated into English, one appearing, as the earliest print of a distinctive Jewish character, in far-off Philadelphia.

Thus he contributed to the recognition of his own people as integral elements of German citizenship.

On one occasion (1760), no doubt encouraged by Lessing, he went so far as to declaim against the great emperor's lack of national spirit, in a review of the latter's poetical works. That a Jew should have had the temerity to call his reigning sovereign to task for composing indifferent verse and for preferring the French language to his native tongue, was a deed as daring as unprecedented. He had already excited the curiosity of the court, five years before, when his first German book was published. According to Lessing (see his letter to Mendelssohn, of December, 1755), all wanted to know "this Jew" who thought so profoundly and expressed himself so eloquently. And so he had come to be looked upon as the embodiment of wisdom. It, therefore, redounds to his credit that he presumed to say this of his royal master's work: "Nearly every stanza shows a trait of this Prince's character, and the whole is a portrait in which his noble soul, his even nobler heart, yea, his very weakness is faithfully limned. What a loss to our mother tongue that this Prince makes a more fluent use of French! The august author should have deemed it beneath his dignity to say, in his Preface:

'My German Muse, a wonderful gibberish,
A barbaric French
Descants upon things as it can.'

Can a writer to whom the present state of philosophy is not unknown and who shows himself everywhere to be a masterful and truth-loving intellect, undertake to dispute the doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul?"

Summoned to Sans Souci for *lese majeste,* on a Sabbath, he received absolution from the Rabbi to ride and appeared before Frederick the Great. Challenged to defend his daring criticism, Mendelssohn neatly turned the tables on his illustrious patron, by the following brilliant witticism: "Whoever makes verse, plays at nine-pins; and whoever plays at nine-pins, be he king or peasant, must have the setter-up tell him how he bowls." The King was so taken aback by this bold but clever retort that, irascible though he generally was, he dismissed his critic without a reprimand. Possibly he feared to brave the sneers of the French cynics, by whom he was constantly surrounded.

This review of Mendelssohn's appeared in a leading periodical, entitled *Letters Concerning the Latest Literature,* edited by Nicolai and himself. It attracted much attention, and it was through the malice of the author of a book which he had unfavorably criticized, that he was arraigned before the King and his Journal condemned.

It was Nicolai, it will be remembered, whom he had met in Lessing's company, in 1755. With his

help he acquired a proficiency in Greek and modern languages. Together, they studied the classics, and, in an incredibly short time, he had mastered his subject so thoroughly as to be able to read all the works of Plato in the original. When the "Coffee-House of the Learned" was established, which is described by some one as "an oasis in the literary wilderness of Berlin", the three friends, Lessing, Nicolai and Mendelssohn became its regular patrons. It comprised a select circle of about one hundred men of science, who cheerfully admitted the young Jewish philosopher to membership, vouched for as he was by such literary stars. At their meetings, each fourth week, a paper on some philosophic or mathematical topic was read by one of their number. Mendelssohn, timid by nature and conscious of his unfortunate defect of speech, presented a written thesis "On Probability", which, at his request, was read for him by a friend. While in the course of recitation, its authorship was promptly recognized, and he was enthusiastically greeted by the learned company. The substance of this paper was repeated in his celebrated *Morgenstunden.*

At about this time he wrote his *Letters on the Emotions,* which contain a philosophy of the beautiful and which form the basis of all philosophical and aesthetic criticism in Germany. On the advice of Lessing, he translated Rousseau's prize essay, *Discours sur l'inegalité parmi les Hommes,* which he published with explanatory notes and a dedicatory letter to "Magister" Lessing, in 1756.

In the same year he became one of the staff editors

of the *Library of Science and Fine Arts,* which had been founded by Nicolai. Indeed, he proved to be the very soul of the undertaking. He contributed a mass of literary material, mainly book reviews. His own studies on aesthetics appeared in this magazine. Mendelssohn, Lessing and Nicolai entered into a correspondence on this subject, in which they discussed the function of tragedy and its emotional manifestations. Upon these series of epistles, which directly influenced Lessing's "Laokoön", were based two monographs by Mendelssohn. One was entiled *The Fundamental Principles of Science and Fine Arts*, and the other *Concerning Lofty and Naive Elements in the Fine Arts.* These publications, which were printed in *The Library,* must be ranked among the most important contributions to pre-Kentian aesthetics.

Before a year had elapsed, Mendelssohn retired from the associate editorship of this periodical, only to join a new venture in the same field, again launched by Nicolai (about 1759). This was called *Letters Concerning the Latest Literature.* It was revolutionary in tendency and soon became the repository of the best thought in Germany. "The criticism which Mendelssohn (upon whom a large part of the editorial work devolved), together with Lessing, introduced, was creative and essentially German in character. Mendelssohn's judgment was always impartial, sane and clear-sighted."

His relations with poets and philosophers in Germany and Switzerland became more and more close as his fame increased. He was greatly admired for

his literary work in the *Letters,* which be continued to edit, in conjunction with his friend, Nicolai, until 1765, and especially for his prize essay on *Metaphysical Science,* which had secured him an award of fifty ducats, in June, 1763, and an enviable victory over Thomas Abbt and Immanuel Kant, with whose rejected theses, his own was finally published. As he had won the esteem of one of the contestants, who later expressed himself in such glowing terms concerning his vivid literary style, so he became also the intimate friend of the other. At Abbt's request, Mendelssohn began a correspondence, in which he set forth the destiny of man and the life of the soul after death. This was published with notes and occupies nearly 200 pages in his *Collected Works* (Leipsic 1843-1845). It forms the basis of his chief philosophical work, the *Phaedo* (1767), the most widely read book of his time and considered one of the best productions of classical German prose. It was reprinted fifteen times and translated into nearly all the European languages, as also into Hebrew. The Crown Prince of Brunswick was so impressed with it that, while on a visit to his uncle, Frederick the Great, in Berlin, in the autumn of 1769, he tried to induce him to come to Brunswick. Other members of Royalty showed him marked preference. It is a singular fact to record that because the Empress Catherine of Russia wished to be elected a regular member of the philosophical division of the Berlin Academy of Sciences, to which honor Mendelssohn had been proposed as a candidate, the King of Prussia wantonly struck his name off the list.

Among those who corresponded with Mendelssohn was Johann Kaspar Lavater, a preacher in Zurich, whose work on physiognomy has become standard. He had visited "the Jew Moses" in his modest lodging several times in 1763 and had afterwards given a very graphic description of "this man with the Socratic soul". Lessing introduced them to one another, and the Christian theologian, a man of varied gifts, was captivated by the charm of Mendelssohn's personality. Writing to a clerical friend, he says: "The Jew, Mendelssohn, author of the philosophical *Letters on the Emotions,* we found in his office, busy with silk goods. A companionable, brilliant soul, with pleasing ideas; the body of an Aesop; a man of keen insight, exquisite taste and wide erudition. He is a great venerator of all thinking minds and himself a metaphysician; an impartial judge of all works of talent and taste; frank and open-hearted in intercourse, more modest in his speech than in his writings, unaffected by praise, free from the tricks of meaner spirits, who aim only at pushing themselves into notoriety; generous, ready to serve his friends; a brother to his brethren, the Jews, affable and respectful to them and by them honored and beloved."

After their acquaintance had ripened into friendship, Lavater conceived the wild ambition of converting him to Christianity. Being repulsed by solid arguments, as well as genial irony, he soon abandoned the plan, only to return to it some years later, in 1769, when he dedicated to him his German translation of the work of a Geneva professor, Charles Bonnet, which

he entitled *An Enquiry into the Proofs of the Truth of Christianity against Unbelievers.* In a prefatory challenge, he solemnly adjures Mendelssohn to refute these arguments in public if he could and, if not, to "do what wisdom and love of truth and understanding must bid him; what a Socrates would have done, if he had read the book and found it unanswerable." Mendelssohn had no choice but to take up the gauntlet, and here again it was Lessing (as we know from his letter of 1771, addressed to his friend), who urged him on. His reply to Lavater is a classic in the domain of apologetic literature. It concludes in these memorable words: "Of all that is of the essence of my faith, I am so firmly and immovably convinced that I testify herewith, before the God of Truth and my Creator and Preserver, by whom you have adjured me, in your appeal, that I shall cleave to my principles so long as my soul does not change its nature."

It is but fair to him who had so rashly provoked this controversy to state that, finding the consensus of friendly opinion against him, and sincerely convinced of his own error, Lavater regretted that he had "involuntarily distressed the most noble of men" and begged his forgiveness. A pamphlet warfare followed the appearance of Mendelssohn's views on the doctrines of Christianity, as expressed in his letters to Lavater, his rejoinder to Bonnet's counterblast, and his epistles to the Crown Prince of Brunswick. To all the spite and calumny called forth by them, he deigned to offer no reply. "Whoever is so obviously anxious to irritate me," he wrote to a friend, "ought

LESSING, MENDELSSOHN AND LAVATER AT CHESS

(*From an old woodcut*)

to have much difficulty in succeeding." Among his few defenders in this fight, may be mentioned with honor Professor Michaelis and the celebrated satirist, Lichtenberg, both of Göttingen. The Crown Prince of Brunswick, one of his ardent admirers, in a letter to him, dated January 2, 1770, expresses his astonishment that he should have been "able to dispose of so delicate a situation with such tact and exalted brotherly love."

Mentally exhausted by these disputations, he went, in July of 1773 and 1774, to Pyrmont for his health, where he became acquainted with Herder, who, noting his popularity, remarked that "Mordecai had as large a following as the grand vizier."

Mendelssohn's warfare with Lavater and his advocates made a deep impression upon Lessing. He was greatly incensed at the cocksureness of these exponents of orthodox Christianity. An opportunity soon presented itself to him to enter the theological arena. His friend, the earnest scholar, Herrmann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768), exasperated by the intrigues of the Lutheran pastors in Hamburg, who aggressively proclaimed their fossilized creed, had written *A Defense of the Rational Worshipers of God,* which rejected all revealed religion and especially attacked the founder of Christianity. He lacked the courage to publish it and left it as an heirloom to his high-minded and talented daughter, Elisa Reimarus. She submitted it to Lessing, who read it with eager interest, but, not wishing to trust his own judgment in matters of theology, he consulted Mendelssohn before giving it to

the world. Although the latter tried to dissuade his friend from printing it, as he found in the work nothing constructive and believed that it would only provoke violent antagonism, Lessing was of the opinion that it would prove effective in rebuking the pride of the Church. Baffled by the Berlin censors, who did not approve a work that was so obviously a firebrand, he hit upon another plan. In assuming charge of the Ducal Library in Wolfenbüttel, he had acquired the privilege of editing the manuscript treasures of that noted collection. He pretended to have discovered the "Fragments of an Unknown" and began to publish the original Reimarus manuscript as an anonymous treatise, in serial form, extending over a period of eight years (1773-1781). One instalment of these *Wolfenbüttel Fragments* was a vigorous and revolutionary expose of Christianity, designed to prove that Jesus and his disciples had conceived a conspiracy against the Sanhedrin and, when finally detected, were forced to declare that the kingdom they had striven to establish was not a temporal but a heavenly one.

This novel and audacious treatment of the early beginnings of the faith created a sensation. The clergy and laity alike were staggered by it. Indeed, the effect was so momentous that many students of theology promptly abandoned their seminary courses, rather than follow a vocation predicated on error. Speculation as to the identity of the mysterious scribe was rife. Even Mendelssohn was openly charged with its authorship. Only a few were aware that the writer was the estimable Reimarus. It goes without saying

that public wrath vented itself upon Lessing, who had no partisans, save his Jewish friend, and he would not venture to step into the breach in a quarrel which he regarded as a domestic affair.

Lessing, writing to his brother, under date of February 25th, and to the author's daughter, on June 22nd, 1780, mentions the fact that one of the malicious lies circulated by his enemies was that the rich Jewish congregation in Amsterdam had presented him with one thousand ducats for his performance. Long since accustomed to fight his own battles, it did not take him long to completely vanquish his enemies, notably the vindicative orthodox pastor, Göze, to whom he directed his celebrated polemical letters entitled *Anti-Göze*.

As his opponents could not meet the arguments against Christianity advanced by the anonymous free-lance, they resorted to the power of the secular arm. As a consequence, in 1778, Lessing was interdicted from publishing further instalments; his previous pamphlets were confiscated; he was obliged to surrender the original manuscripts; the liberty of the press was withheld from him; and the injunction laid upon him not to write anything more on the subject. He protested vigorously against these high-handed measures, but, as his livelihood was at stake, he was forced to submit. But even then he was planning a noble revenge. In one of his sleepless nights, he tells us, in a letter written on August 10, 1778, he recalled a rough draft he had made, many years before, of a dramatic poem, based upon an episode in Boccaccio,

which, he calculated, would bring more confusion into the ranks of the Lutheran zealots than another series of "Fragments" from Wolfenbüttel.

The creation of *Nathan the Wise* was, therefore, the result of a natural reaction. It fully accomplished its purpose. It confounded the insular Christian pietists who arrogated to themselves all the virtues of their faith and looked upon the Jews with revulsion and disdain.

"When Lessing selected a Jew to be the hero of his grandest play, the innovation was so unheard of as to make his courage more striking perhaps than any act he ever performed—and he was the most intrepid of men. 'Nathan the Wise' was written late in life, when Lessing's philosophy had ripened, and when his spirit, sorely tried in every way, had gained from sad experience only sweeter humanity. Judged by rules of art, it is easy to find fault with it, but one is impatient at any attempt to measure it by such a trivial standard. It is thrilled from first to last by a glowing God-sent fire—such as has appeared rarely in the literature of the world. It teaches love to God and man, tolerance, the beauty of peace.

"In Nathan, a Jew who has suffered at the hands of the Crusaders the extremest affliction—the loss of his wife and seven children—is not embittered by the experience. He, with two other leading figures, Saladin and the Templar, are bound together in a close intimacy. They are all examples of nobleness, though individualized. In Nathan, severe chastening has brought to pass the finest gentleness and love. Saladin

is the perfect type of chivalry, though impetuous and over-lavish, through the possession of great power. The Templar is full of the vehemence of youth. So they stand, side by side, patterns of admirable manhood, yet representatives of creeds most deeply hostile. Thus, in concrete presentment, Lessing teaches impressively, what he had often elsewhere inculcated in a less varied way, one of the grandest lessons, that nobleness is bound to no confession of faith.

"It was his thought—and here many will think he went too far—that every historic religion is in some sense divine, a necessary evolution, from the conditions under which it originates. What a man believes is a matter of utter indifference if his life is not good.

"Goldwin Smith, in a paper in the *Nineteenth Century,* in which some injustice is done to the Jewish character and the facts of Jewish history, declares that Nathan the Wise is an impossible personage, the pure creation of the brain of the dramatist. Lessing, however, as is well known, found the suggestion for his superb figure in Moses Mendelssohn, and . . . . . there are abundant data for concluding that Lessing's Jew was no mere fancy sketch. It may be said, in truth, that the character is exceptional, and that Jews, as the world knows them, are something quite different. But among the votaries of what creed, pray, would not such a character be exceptional! If exceptional, it is not unparalleled. Judaism is capable of giving birth to humane and tolerant spirits, even in our time, and such spirits are not at all unknown in its past annals." (James

K. Hosmer, *The Story of the Jews,* N. Y., 1886, pp. 251-253.)

It is gratifying to record the fact that it was a Jew who made the writing of this immortal epic possible. Lessing needed money. He had no friends rich enough to help him; nor would he accept a kindness from everyone. When his financial embarrassment became irksome, he received a loan from Moses Wessely of Hamburg, a brother of the celebrated Hebrew poet, Naphtali Hartwig Wessely, who, though by no means wealthy himself, cheerfully advanced as much as Lessing required, asking in return only the privilege of possessing a letter autographed by him.

As he had predicted, *Nathan the Wise* precipitated a veritable storm. The ire of all pious Christians was concentrated on it. Even the "Fragments" and his trenchant onslaughts upon Göze were forgotten in this new arraignment of the orthodox creed. They could overlook the ruthless character of the Patriarch, but not the glorification of Judaism, as portrayed in his exemplary Jew, at the expense of their own faith. Lessing's most trusted friends began to shun him, and this distressed him so keenly that, almost isolated as he was, he soon lost his jovial manner and elasticity and became morose and taciturn. The last year of his life was embittered by this treatment.

"He died in vigorous manhood like an aged man, a martyr to his love of truth. But his soul-conquering voice made itself heard on behalf of tolerance and gradually softened the discordant notes of hatred and prejudice. In spite of the ban placed upon 'Nathan', as

well as upon its author, both in Protestant and Catholic countries, this drama became one of the most popular in German poetry, and as often as the verses inspired by conviction resound from the stage, they seize upon the hearts of the audience, loosening the links of the chain of Jew-hatred in the minds of Germans, who find it most difficult to throw off its shackles. 'Nathan' made an impression on the mind of the German people, which, despite unfavorable circumstances, has not been obliterated. Twenty years before, when Lessing produced his first drama of 'The Jews', an arrogant theologian censured it, because it was altogether too improbable that among a people like the Jews, so noble a character could ever be formed. At the appearance of 'Nathan', no reader thought that a noble Jew was possible. Even the most stubborn dared not assert so monstrous an absurdity. The Jewish ideal sage was a reality and lived in Berlin, an ornament not alone to the Jews, but to the German nation. *Without Mendelssohn, the drama of 'Nathan' would not have been written, just as without Lessing's friendship Mendelssohn would not have become what he did to German literature and the Jewish world.* The cordiality of the intimacy between these two friends showed itself after Lessing's death. His brothers and friends, who only after his demise realized his greatness, turned, in the anguish of their loss, to Mendelssohn, as if it were natural that he should be the chief mourner. And in very sooth he was; none of his associates preserved Lessing's memory with so sorrowful a remembrance and religious a reverence. He

was beyond all things solicitous to protect his former friend against misapprehension and slander."

Though Mendelssohn was spared the cruel fate of his life-long friend and did not live to see his cherished ideals ground into the dust by the apostacy of his nearest of kin, he suffered a mortal hurt when he learned from the poet's friend, Jacobi, to whom as well as to Herder, he had confided the plan of erecting a worthy literary memorial to Lessing, that toward the end of his days, he had openly professed Spinozism. To one who ardently cleaved to the idea of a personal God, Providence and the immortality of the soul, it seemed almost inconceivable that a dear comrade, who had never hidden the thoughts of his heart, should have dissembled his convictions. He imagined that if Lessing had looked askance at his philosophy, it would perhaps soon become obsolete. These reflections interfered with his peace of mind and made him restive and petulant.

Although in his last work, the *Morgenstunden,* or "Lectures on the Existence of God", originally delivered, in 1785, to his son and other Jewish and Christian students, including the two Humboldts, he simulated a tranquility he did not feel, he became so unnerved by the strain of a rejoinder he was writing to Jacobi's book, wherein he was attacked and challenged, that he finally succumbed.

This literary apology, entitled *To the Friends of Lessing,* proved to be his Swan Song. On the very day he handed the manuscript to his publisher, he caught cold and a stroke of apoplexy brought his eventful and glorious life to a close (January 4, 1786).

He died, as he had lived, a valiant champion in the cause of righteousness, a loyal and devoted friend. One is reminded of that sword of a truly faithful knight, on which was graven the device: "Never draw me without right; never sheathe me without honor!"

The Prussian capital and all the world mourned the loss of a man upon whose like they were not soon to look again. The great Kant, lamenting in sorrow, exclaimed: *"Ah, there was but one Mendelssohn!"* His Christian friends, Nicolai, Biester and Engel, the last a tutor of Crown Prince Frederick III, petitioned to erect a memorial to him, on the public square, facing the Royal Opera House, and, while this did not materialize, it is a satisfaction to record that the city of Dessau, where he was born, reared him a monument, on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of his birth, and that his great-grandson commemorated his career by establishing a foundation of one hundred and fifty thousand marks in his honor, at the University of Berlin. The Union of German Jewish congregations issued a *Lessing-Mendelssohn Memorial Book* (Leipsic, 1879) in celebration of the centenary of "Nathan the Wise", containing literary tributes from the pen of many gifted writers.

Lessing died on February 15, 1781. Though in his last years he had written to Mendelssohn but seldom, we have the entire correspondence which passed between these two ideal friends preserved intact. Practically all the letters have been published. They present an example of literary friendship seldom paral-

leled in history. It is noteworthy that some of these letters to Lessing were written on the eve of the Sabbath. Mendelssohn was frequently obliged to break off abruptly, so as not to violate the sanctity of the day. Once he deplored the fact that the oncoming Sabbath prevented him from hastening to his stricken friend in Wolfenbüttel. In these trifles, as in matters more vital and grave, he showed himself a sincere and steadfast Jew, faithful to the behests of his Fathers.

Happily, he lived to see the dawn of the era of emancipation for his people, whose ethical consciousness he had helped, together with Lessing, to vitalize and stimulate. It must never be forgotten that Lessing awakened Mendelssohn to the realization of his mission and that, through him, the illustrious poet liberated Judaism from the self-imposed fetters of the spirit.

III.

ANALYSIS OF THE PLOT

Nathan, a rich Jewish merchant in Jerusalem, whose trade routes lie across the Jordan, beyond the Tigris and the Euphrates, has a foster child, named Recha, placed into his custody by a monk, when yet in her infancy. He rears her with exquisite tenderness, lavishing upon her all the wealth of a father's love. The secret of her origin is known to but one other beside the friar. Nathan's Christian servant, Daja, though devoted to both father and daughter, grows restive under the ban of silence imposed upon her and longs to ease her oversensitive conscience by divulging the truth of their relations. When, during one of Nathan's periodic absences from home, a brave young Templar, providentially pardoned by the Sultan because of a fancied resemblance to his dead brother, Assad, rescues Recha from death, her gratitude is fanned into flame by his persistent isolation and elusiveness, and develops from hero-worship into romantic love. Daja now determines to seize the first opportunity to tell the story of her birth. Nathan, returning with a rich caravan, learns of the Templar's deed and seeks him out, brooding among the date-trees and the palms. He proceeds to pour out his heart, but the knight spurns him, disdaining kinship with a Jew.

He yields, however, to the latter's gentle pleading and, touched by his wisdom and benevolence, is persuaded to visit Recha, whose love he soon ardently requites, despite the stern discipline enjoined by his Order. When Daja finally confesses that Recha is a Christian and not a Jewess, he is so obsessed by a sense of sacred duty that he repairs to the Patriarch of Jerusalem for counsel in his predicament. Although already prejudiced against him, by reason of the fact that the prelate had attempted to involve him in an intrigue which would lead to the assassination of Saladin, his benefactor, he states his case hypothetically, without betraying Nathan, for whom he still cherishes a reverent affection. He is repelled by the Patriarch's self-righteousness and inhumanity, and goes to the Sultan, before whom, torn by conflicting emotions, he denounces Nathan, only to be sternly rebuked by the enlightened monarch, who declares that Mussulman and Christian are alike to him and chides him not to be a Christian to the injury of Jew or Mussulman. But he pledges his royal word that Recha should become his, whimsically indulging the passionate lover, in whom he again pictures his long-lost Assad.

In the meantime, Nathan had won the Sultan's favor in a singular manner: His treasurer, Al-Hafi, a former dervise and a loyal friend of the Jew, sorely exercised by his sovereign's reckless generosity, which appears to have been his only vice, reveals, in an unguarded moment, the touching little comedy played by Sittah, Saladin's equally magnanimous sister. A winner of considerable sums at chess with her royal

brother, she secretly orders them to be put back into the imperial treasury, advancing always more funds from her own resources to tide over the financial stringency, until the long-heralded gold from Egypt arrives. The Sultan, staggered by this pious fraud, refuses to countenance further sacrifices on her part and charges Al-Hafi to take instant measures to replenish his coffers, by borrowing from his friend, the Jew. The good man, deeply distressed, vainly attempts to divert the monarch from his purpose. Eager to shield Nathan, whose benefactions are only equal to the Sultan's and whose means he already sees jeopardized—an easy prey to his master's spendthrift philanthropy—he hastens to the Jew and eagerly coaxes him to flee with him to the Ganges, in the garb of a dervise, rather than stay to be mulcted by Saladin. This Nathan gently declines to do and bids farewell to Al-Hafi, bent on flight, saying: "Wild, noble, good—How shall I call him? Truly, the genuine beggar is the only king!"

Summoned to court, he shows himself a skilful casuist and at once commands the monarch's admiration. With Sittah eavesdropping behind the curtain, Saladin is on his mettle and adroitly propounds the query which of the three great religions is the best. Granted a moment's time for reflection, Nathan, surprised that truth and not gold was wanted, and not altogether reassured that this whim did not conceal a snare, invents an ingenious apologue, wherewith to bring conviction to the monarch's susceptible heart. And he succeeds. The parable of The Three Rings,

borrowed from Boccaccio, is here masterfully told, with a charm and dramatic power which far transcends the original, if indeed the two versions can bear comparison at all. The royal listener is held spellbound by this subtly-conveyed lesson in religious tolerance, which finds a spontaneous response in his impulsive, generous nature. Indeed, the story at once serves as the *motif* and *tendenz* of this immortal epic. It is the mould into which the poet poured all his molten gold. The exalted thought, the choice diction and the spiritual fervor, all flow from the crucible of his own impassioned soul. Small wonder then that the imagination of the great Eastern prince should be touched and that the artistic climax, with its daring challenge of infallibility, should bring him humbly to the narrator's feet. "Be my friend!" exclaims Saladin, quite overcome by emotion.

Nathan then delicately offers his money bags, as a gift, which the Sultan, hard-pressed though he is for funds, reluctantly accepts, only to repay the loan on the instant his caravan of tribute from the Nile arrives, not forgetting to lavish a goodly portion of the new-found treasure upon the faithful Sittah—disdaining an overplus of wealth. The royal pair conspire to straighten out the much-entangled romance of the two lovers, send for Recha, show her the most tender consideration, reconcile their seemingly impossible differences, and, when they are finally apprised of the Templar's true identity, through the Lay-Brother's revelations to Nathan, who had all along suspected the knight to be the son of an old comrade,

the Sultan's favorite younger brother, Assad, the denoument is overwhelming. The Templar turns out to be Recha's brother; and the curtain goes down with the two young people clinging to their sovereign uncle's heart.

IV.

THE CHARACTERS

With a plot so absorbing and complicated, it is significant that the poet maintained so high an artistic level and did not mar its beauty and dignity by melodramatic effects. Though pointing a moral, one is never conscious of the preachment. He presents eternal verities with a simplicity and directness which give a noble fervor to his emotional appeal. He is an ardent seeker after truth. It is the key-note of the poem and brings to mind the celebrated epigrammatic metaphor he employs elsewhere:

"If God held all truth shut in His right hand, and in His left, nothing but an ever-restless striving after truth, though with the condition of forever and ever erring, and should say to me, 'Choose!' I would bow reverently to his left hand and say, 'Father, give! Pure truth is for Thee alone!'"

This sublime utterance may be termed a paraphrase of the old Rabbinic dictum: "Truth is the signet ring of God."

A critical survey of the characters resolves itself into a study in contrasts.

Daja—following the order of their appearance on the scene—is a loyal, trusted servant, deeply attached to the merchant's household. She recognizes her

master's rugged honesty; his unexampled devotion to his adopted child; his prodigal kindness to herself, which manifests itself in the costly gifts he lavishes upon her whenever he returns from his travels. Yet she cannot bring herself to condone what she assumes to be a defect in his otherwise flawless character in not restoring a Christian orphan to the church. While her cupidity and natural love of finery act as a stay to her ever-recurrent impulse to denounce him to the Patriarch, she does not scruple, once the Templar crosses her path, with her own destiny hanging in the balance, to renounce her allegiance to the home which has so bountifully sheltered her. Characteristic is the request she makes of the Templar, after she unburdens her secret:

"But when you take her back to Europe,
Pray leave me not behind."

Weak, selfish and calculating, though not without intrinsic virtues, she presents a type admirably sketched.

In Nathan, we have one of the richest, truest and loftiest conceptions in the whole realm of German literature. Indeed, it would be hard to find his parallel elsewhere. One noted critic maintains that he alone, of all creations of fiction, approximates the Christ ideal. That he should stand head and shoulders above the personages marshalled before our eyes with such consummate artistry by the author, is only proof of the wide-spread belief that he took his model from life and that, in the Jew, Lessing intended to portray his friend, Moses Mendelssohn, the German Socrates,

who combined a splendid philosophic calm with worldly wisdom, and the sweet benignity of whose private life is a matter of common knowledge. Surely, no finer tribute has ever been paid to a Jew by a Christian. In the history of human tolerance, this is a golden chapter indeed.

Merchant and sage, animated by the noblest ideals, which remain deeply rooted in the face of every misfortune; chastened and sanctified by self-abnegation, yet retaining those distinctive traits which make him essentially human, he is not in the least idealized by the poet's fancy. He meets the great men of the world with diffidence, but without fear; with delicate caution, but with a sturdy self-reliance, which enables him to master any situation. He has both courage and reserve, blandness and strategy, wit and friendly banter, at easy command. He is guileless withal, and he never fails to convey the impression of complete poise and sincerity. Strong in his ethical consciousness, he is not like the Patriarch, full of arrogant self-righteousness, but uses it as a natural lever to move the high-minded and spiritual monarch, in whom he recognizes a kindred soul. In his dealings with all men, he is frank, magnanimous and modest, approaching them with a pleasing humility which is more noble than servile. A profound intellectual culture takes the place of a pride of race and imparts to all his actions and utterances a becoming dignity and grace. His is a broad tolerance, conceding to each his inalienable right; and, wherever he meets bigotry, he overcomes it without effort or artifice. It is his

naturalness, serenity and moral fervor which win all hearts. He has the genuine ring, which makes its wearer beloved of God and man.

Recha becomes his creature, and he moulds her plastic nature by working upon her emotions through her intelligence. He strengthens the native purity of her soul by a patient, purposeful rationalism, wholly devoid of cant and pedantry. He is not a dogmatist, advances no theological creed or doctrine, but brings conviction to the mind by the straight and subtle processes of reason. His solicitous kindness restrains Daja; links his foster-daughter to himself closer than any tie of blood; disarms the morose, suspicious and solitary Templar; claims the homage of the Indian dervise; the loyalty of the quaint, humble but honest Lay-Brother, who, as the unwilling emissary of the priest, would do no wrong; and conquers the heart of the mighty prince, who well merits the title of his rank—"Protector of the Faithful". In him, the artist's brush has limned a luminous portrait, all harmony of tone and color; a masterpiece for all generations.

Recha is a sweet, unspoiled, amiable child, living in a world of sublime ideals. She is all naivete and innocence. She clings to her father, even after she learns of her true origin, with a steadfastness and rapturous love, touching to behold. She will have him and no other for her parent. How spontaneously she responds to his call! With what filial piety she follows him in his wanderings! How she defies the world to tear him from her adoring heart! Her im-

agination is stirred by her miraculous rescue from the flames, and she yields to the half romantic, half mystical fancy, which would seem grotesque in any other adolescent child, that the Knight is a supernatural being, until the father, first tender and indulging her humor, sanely reasons it out of her head. And with what ineffable womanly charm she melts into her brother's arms when he ungraciously receives the truth—that she is his sister. Here is a bit of delicate comedy, which, but for the poet's intuitive sense of dramatic values, could well have degenerated into farce.

In sharp contrast to Recha, in whom it is assumed Lessing designed to idealize his own adopted daughter, stands the knightly lover, an open-hearted, high-minded, upright and innately unprejudiced youth, whom the Crusades have taught that it is mere pious frenzy to flaunt his God before the world as the only best, but who, nevertheless, looks askance upon the Jew, until he probes his intrinsic worth. Not before gusts of passion have swept through his soul and the effect of his headlong resentment threatened Nathan and his household with disaster, does he realize his error and expiate it in the keenest remorse. His sense of justice, his inherent nobility of disposition, even his stubborn pride, which betrayed his aristocratic birth, are all vividly portrayed, and one can readily sympathize with Saladin for condoning the valiant, violent, impetuous boy, in whom he has so unerringly recognized his favorite Assad.

Some of the Templar's shining qualities are revealed

in his royal kinsman. Saladin is all heart, impulse and temperament. Genial, lovable, quixotically generous, he is every inch a prince. His magnanimity is spontaneous and unaffected, and rounds out a character which, in its salient features, resembles Lessing's. For the poet's own spiritual nature, his moral trend and his habits of mind afford a singularly close parallel. He, too, had a passion for human kinship, regardless of creed, color and condition. He was effervescent, impulsive, buoyant and convivial—a *bon camerade* with all men. He loved disputation and controversy, and the soulful legend of the three rings, illustrating the potency of all religious beliefs and emphasizing the Fatherhood of God, is the expression of his own individual *credo*. The genius of the polemist comes into play in the satirical dialogue between the Templar and the Lay-Brother, and in the scene where the Patriarch ponders, with evident unction and zest, upon the problem the Knight circumspectly unfolds to his view. Saladin, like his creator, is full of kindly banter, assuming, at times, a tone of austere rebuke; but he is never stern and vindictive. His judgment is tempered by mercy. He thinks quickly and clearly, and his conclusions are inevitably sane and just. Noble and chivalrous, he puts one in mind of Haroun al Rashid, the great democratic prince of the Arabian Nights, who did good by stealth and moved about incognito among his subjects, in the dead of night, to be able to read them aright and to deal wisely and humanely with them.

It is pointed out by an astute critic of the drama

that Saladin was far too generous to prevail upon the Jew by a ruse. It was Sittah who originated the snare wherewith to entrap him, but, whereas, in Boccaccio's story, the Sultan was satisfied by Melchizedek's ingenious evasion, the monarch here earnestly seeks the truth and is gratified and humbled by Nathan's parable and its application. He is stirred to the depths, instinctively sensing the other's greatness, and pledges his august patronage in return. Under the spell of this absorbing legend, one unconsciously reverts to a similar scene, enacted before another mighty Eastern king—the sweet singer of Israel, to whom a humble prophet propounded a problem of conscience, with equal dignity and force, and with a like dramatic climax.

It is this episode in the play which moves the imagination of the audience and evokes enthusiastic applause. Though often imitated by great dramatic poets—notably, in Schiller's *Don Carlos*—no one has yet even approximately achieved so distinctive a triumph in artistic effect, and it is unlikely that this model will ever be improved upon.

Generous in his benefactions to the point of recklessness; improvident and disdainful of money cares, like Lessing himself, Saladin cheerfully submits to his sister's dominance in matters of finance and worldly wisdom. As in his relation to others, he is tender, considerate and indulgent toward her, pouring his gold into her lap with regal unconcern;—a game loser at chess, in which chivalry spurns to take advantage of a chance to win, while victory is still in sight. Even

Al-Hafi, who recounts the incident to his friend Nathan, is staggered by this show of princely courtesy, and despairing of his ability to guard the treasury against his master's noble extravagance, deserts his post to rejoin his brothers in the faith. Here again, it is to the author's fondness for chess, in which he was an adept, that we owe perhaps the most absorbing and affecting episode in the drama.

One is impressed by the monarch's masterful will, his splendid humors; his outbursts of passion; his gift for conciliation; his unrestrained generosity, which is as natural as his unselfishness; his enlightened tolerance in all things affecting his fellowmen; but especially by his sane, wholesome democracy, which renders him so human and approachable. Whatever flaws the captious may find in his character, none can deny that we have in Saladin a counterpart of the great Friedrich of Hohenstaufen—an illustrious prince indeed.

Sittah serves as a picturesque background for Saladin. In some respects, she complements him. While she dominates in trifles, as well as in matters of great moment, and he defers to her judgment with the gracious courtesy characteristic of him, she draws inspiration from his rich mind and enthusiastic nature. Her frugality, serene intelligence, clear insight, and, above all, her beautiful devotion to him, enable her to comprehend him thoroughly and to enter into his inner life with a sympathy and understanding which become a prop and a comfort to him. In dealing with policies of state, she shows herself less liberal in her views,

as when she derides the projected alliance with Richard and again when she advocates a bolder course with Nathan, whom the Sultan is about to receive. Yet, she is not petty and narrow-minded, and does nothing to thwart his plans and ideals. They are two comrades, acting in perfect harmony, howevermuch they may seem to differ in essentials. It is assuredly a mistake to aver that she was cunning and that she was "actuated by a multitude of almost imperceptible feminine motives". There is nothing in the text to justify such a charge.

Lessing's delicate humor is evidenced in his delineation of the Dervise, who is said to have been patterned after a Jewish mathematician of Mendelssohn's entourage, a young Pole, Abraham Wolf Rechenmeister by name. Though risen to prominence at the Sultan's court, where he watches with melancholy resignation the dwindling treasury, his heart is with his brethren in India. "Beside the Ganges only are there men," he says to his friend, Nathan, who, sensing the yearning of this beggar-philosopher, and not altogether strange to the emotion himself, exclaims:

"Al-Hafi, make all haste,
To get into your wilderness again.
I fear lest living among men, you will cease
To be a man yourself."

And he goes back to his people, satisfied that he plays but a sorry role as the nominal financier of state, which his master's chronic lavishness makes untenable, and convinced that perfect happiness for him lies in renouncing the world, with its pleasures and allure-

ments, and in leading a life of contemplation and self-effacement. With all his monastic ideals, he is a lovable figure—almost a match for the Jewish sage, whom he venerates.

By way of both contrast and parallel, we have the Lay-Brother, a weakling with a conscience, who combines cringing humility with a passion for righteousness. Ostensibly a blind tool of the Patriarch, he deftly contrives to show him in an unfavorable light, without violating the letter of his instructions. He is shrewd without cunning; bland without guile; submissive without loss of dignity; and ruggedly honest, despite the nature of the errands in which he is engaged. His truly pious mind follows a simple code —charitableness and compassion. When he warns Nathan of the probable consequence of his own magnanimous deed, in which he sees only a splendid expression of humanity, he shows himself the true Christian. It was through his foresight that the discovery of the precious heirloom led to the establishment of the Knight's paternity. There is something genuine, tender, almost noble in his attitude, and the poet's felicitous conception of him brings him very near to our hearts.

Finally, we have, in the Patriarch, the most glaring contrast of all. Impervious to the dictates of humanity, and obstinately dogmatic and combative to the point of fanaticism, he wraps himself in the cloak of sanctity and excommunicates all who dissent from his accepted creed. He is pictured as a "fat, rosy, jolly prelate", but we should have imagined him rather

gaunt, sinister and forbidding. Undoubtedly, Lessing meant him to be a caricature of his old adversary, Melchior Goeze, and it must have afforded him a humorous satisfaction to finish him off with such a lifelike pastel.

One knows not what to single out as his predominant trait:—his boastful self-sufficiency, or his hypocrisy; his bigotry or his pompous piety. An egotist to the core, he deludes himself into the belief that he is the viceroy of God on earth and that God needs his protection. He and Daja are one in their emphasis upon Christian revelation as the only scheme of salvation. Whoever deviates one jot from orthodox doctrine is doomed to perdition. When the Templar acquaints him with the details of the story he had heard from Daja's lips, his severity becomes vindictiveness, and he longs to mete out punishment to the Jew, whose rare charity of heart he is incapable of understanding. That Recha should have been given shelter, protection and a father's devoted love, in the face of an experience which would have filled another man with violent hatred to the Christian; that she should have been reared with consideration, tenderness and scrupulous care, in the fear of God, though not necessarily in the evangelical faith, is condemned as a crime by the implacable priest, who exclaims:

"For all is violence
That's done to children, is it not?—That is
Excepting what the church may do to children!"

When the Knight, taken aback by this monstrous doctrine, is impelled to plead:

"But if the child in misery had died
Unless the Jew had had compassion on it?"

the Patriarch promptly rejoins:

"It matters not; the Jew goes to the stake!
Better the child had died in misery here
Than thus be saved for everlasting ruin."

Three times the arrogant churchman, investing himself in his inflexible creed as in a coat of mail, renders this inhuman verdict. For such a deed of mercy he has but a triple stake as reward.

On finding the Templar no longer communicative, he threatens instant reprisal by an appeal to the Sultan, resting his claim for protection upon the treaty the monarch had sworn, and forgetting, now that his self-interest is uppermost, that he had planned to destroy his life. How he cringes when he learns that this young Crusader is summoned to court, and with what cant he makes swift obeisance, fearing lest his own liberty be imperiled:—

"Ah!—The Knight, I know,
Found favor with the Sultan. I but pray
To be remembered graciously to him.
My only motive is my zeal for God.
If I in aught exceed, 'tis for His sake.
I pray the Knight will so consider it.
That tale about the Jew was but a problem—
Not so, Sir Knight?....."

Truckler and sycophant, using religion merely as a means to power, he assumes the role of grand inquisitor and knows not the gentle precept of the prophet: "What doth the Lord require of thee but to

do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God!"

These are the varied and distinctive types which the poet presents to our view. The priest is the only personage in the drama who is ignoble and repellant. All the others are richly dowered with genial human traits. They are a select company. But, however one or the other may shine by his own intrinsic merit, the figure of the Jewish merchant-sage looms most conspicuous. He is the single hero amid a splendid coterie of men, a character quaint, genial, strong, lofty and lovable—a veritable exemplar of the noblest and the best.

V.

THE PARABLE OF THE THREE RINGS

ANALOGUES AND PARALLELS

It will be recalled that Lessing's theological duel with Göze was over the essence of religion. In "Nathan" the poet designed to typify, in living and tangible form, the elemental conditions of religion. He embodied in his characters, without meaning to do so, the pivotal questions in this controversy. It may therefore be said that polemics helped to give to the world this wonderful didactic poem, which the author called the "son of his advancing old age". But, it must be understood that it was not inspired by his disputation with Göze. Those who would read any such meaning into the drama have not inquired into its origin. As already stated, it had been conceived long before he knew the Hamburg pastor. In a letter to his brother, he said that it was a theme which he had sketched out many years ago. Perhaps the beginnings of his plan may be traced back to the first period of his literary activity.

One of Lessing's achievements was to disinter long-forgotten characters in history and to rescue them from oblivion. Among those whom he had thus reinstated was Hieronymus Cardanus, an Italian philosopher of the sixteenth century, who, in his *De Sub-*

tilitate, compares the four religions of the world—the Pagan, Jewish, Christian and Moslem. His work took the form of a colloquy, in which each speaker defends his own creed against others. It was charged that Christianity was accorded the humblest place in the author's estimate. Lessing controverts this view. Indeed, he maintains that the Jews and Mohammedans do not receive adequate treatment. Had Lessing been pleading their cause, he would have made out quite a different case for these two religions; and in his essay on Cardanus, he proceeds to sketch out a little plan of defense for them. This recalls the leading motive of the poem. The Christian, Jewish and Mohammedan religions enter the lists against one another. Each one is called upon to speak on its own behalf, in such a way that the anti-Christian religions may have full justice done them. It is natural that the thought of presenting the subject dramatically should have occurred to him at that time.

However, we know, from his own statement, that he derived his inspiration for the story of the three rings from Boccaccio's "Decameron", the text of which we give in full, later. Yet there is one important difference between Lessing and Boccaccio. With the latter, the ring is only a jewel, entitling the possessor to nothing but the inheritance and the position of head of the family. With Lessing, on the contrary, it bears a higher significance: it had the secret power of giving favor, in sight of God and man, to him who wore it with a believing heart. In "Nathan", the ring bears a certain charm. The wearer is destined to win all

hearts. "Only he who sows love, reaps love. He who receives the most love, because he has given the most, is undoubtedly in possession of the true ring. But all three are disputing. Each considers himself the favored one and the others impostors. Each one hates the others. So long as this intolerant, selfish strife continues, the treasure of love is not among them; so long the true ring remains undiscovered; so long all three that are produced are counterfeit. And how if the true ring should declare itself? If its power should begin to work? Then one is the most beloved and must, therefore, have earned love; it must have conquered the hearts of the others. And if one is the best beloved, there must be love and, therefore, purity of heart, in the others. Each one will, in proportion to his power of self-renunciation, love his neighbor, understand his views and practise forbearance."

This is the main drift of the parable, and it can readily be seen that Lessing's presentation far transcends the original in Boccaccio.

In order to enable the reader to judge for himself the contrast between the two versions, we let Boccaccio speak for himself:—

"Saladin was so brave and great a man, that he had raised himself from an inconsiderable station, to be Sultan of Babylon and had gained many victories over both Turkish and Christian princes. This monarch, having in divers wars, and by many extraordinary expenses, run through all his treasure, some urgent occasion fell out that he wanted a large sum of

money. Not knowing which way he might raise enough to answer his necessities, he at last called to mind a rich Jew of Alexandria, named Melchizedeck, who let out money at interest. Him he believed to have wherewithal to serve him; but then he was so covetous, that he would never do it willingly, and Saladin was loath to force him. But, as necessity has no law, after much thinking which way the matter might best be effected, he at last resolved to use force under some colour of reason. He, therefore, sent for the Jew, received him in a most gracious manner, and making him sit down, thus addressed him: 'Worthy man, I hear from divers persons that thou art very wise and knowing in religious matters; wherefore I would gladly know from thee which religion thou judgest to be the true one, viz. the Jewish, the Mohammedan, or the Christian?' The Jew (truly a wise man) found that Saladin had a mind to trap him, and must gain his point should he exalt any one of the three religions above the others; after considering, therefore, for a little how best to avoid the snare, his ingenuity at last supplied him with the following answer:

"The question which your Highness has proposed is very curious; and, that I may give you my sentiments, I must beg leave to tell a short story. I remember often to have heard of a great and rich man, who, among his most rare and precious jewels, had a ring of exceeding beauty and value. Being proud of possessing a thing of such worth and desirous that it should continue forever in his family, he declared,

by will, that whichsoever of his sons he should give this ring, him he designed for his heir, and that he should be respected as the head of the family. That son to whom the ring was given, made the same law with respect to his descendants, and the ring passed from one to another in long succession, till it came to a person who had three sons, all virtuous and dutiful to their father, and all equally beloved by him. Now the young men, knowing what depended upon the ring, and ambitious of superiority, began to entreat their father, who was now grown old, every one for himself, that he would give the ring to him. The good man, equally fond of all, was at a loss which to prefer; and, as he had promised all and wished to satisfy all, he privately got an artist to make two other rings, which were so like the first, that he himself scarcely knew the true one. When he found his end approaching, he secretly gave one ring to each of his sons; and they, after his death, all claimed the honour and estate, each disputing with his brothers, and producing his ring; and the rings were found so much alike, that the true one could not be distinguished. To law then they went, as to which should succeed, nor is that question yet decided. And thus it has happened, my Lord, with regard to the three laws given by God the Father, concerning which you proposed your question: every one believes he is the true heir of God, has his law, and obeys his commandments; but which is in the right is uncertain, in like manner as with the rings.'

Saladin perceived that the Jew had very cleverly

escaped the net which was spread for him; he, therefore, resolved to discover his necessity to him, and see if he would lend him money, telling him at the same time what he had designed to do, had not that discreet answer prevented him. The Jew freely supplied the monarch with what he wanted; and Saladin afterwards paid him back in full, made him large presents, besides maintaining him nobly at his court, and was his friend as long as he lived."

It is claimed that Boccaccio derived his story from a celebrated collection of Italian tales, composed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, entitled *Cento Novelle Antiche,* whose author is not known, although they have been ascribed, without adequate proof, to Dante, Brunetto Latini and Francesco Barberini. While some scholars maintain, from internal evidence, that the *Novelle* had a single author, a Florentine merchant, one is obliged to conclude, for sufficient reasons, that this is not the case. The greater part of the material describes incidents from the second half of the thirteenth century. It may be accepted, on the authority of Dr. Marcus Landau, who wrote a fascinating book on "The Sources of the Decameron", that the stories were collected in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, possibly after Boccaccio's death. Of course, it is probable that the latter used a great deal of the matter contained in the "Novelle", which was circulated as oral tradition, but it is quite safe to assume that he had no complete written text before him, certainly not in collected form, especially as manuscripts of these stories were

always exceedingly rare and have only recently been discovered. Up to the present time, no copy of a dated edition from the fifteenth century has been located. The first edition appeared in Bologna in 1525, and the second in Florence, in 1572.

There is, in the "Novelle", a brief and naive version of the story of Saladin and the Jew, which Boccaccio may or may not have seen. It tells of a Sultan, who, being in need of money, determined to find some fault with a rich Jew who was in his dominions and deprive him of his extensive property. Accordingly the Sultan sent for the Jew and demanded to know which was the true faith, designing that if he should reply "the Jewish", to say "you are blaspheming against my religion" and if he should answer "The Moslem", to retort "why are you then a Jew?" When the Jew saw himself thus cornered, he took refuge in this parable: "There was a father who had three sons. He had a ring with a precious stone, the most valuable in the world. Each of the sons besought his father to bequeath to him this ring; the father, seeing that each of them was desirous of having it, sent for a skilful goldsmith and caused him to make two rings so like the original that no one but himself could tell the difference. Then he sent for his sons in turn and gave them each a ring, but none of them knew which was the true one. "And thus" concluded the Jew, "I answer as regards the three religions. Our Father on High knows, and we who are the sons each believe we possess the true ring." The Sultan, baffled by the Jew's ingenuity, knew not what to reply, and decided to let him go unmolested.

Landau does not agree that this is the prototype of the Boccaccio story, but contends that its more immediate source is the *Avventuroso Ciciliano,* composed by Busone de' Rafaelli, of Gubbio, commonly called Bosone or Busone. He was born about 1280 and died in 1350. He is known to have been a friend of Dante and of the Hebrew poet Immanuel of Rome (sometimes called Manoello), with whom he exchanged complimentary sonnets. Busone's account is as follows:—

"Ansalon the Jew dwelt in Babylon, and was enormously rich, and I would have you to know that throughout the whole universe the Jews are hated and have no country nor Lord. It happened that Saladin was in want of money on account of a war he was carrying on against the Christians, and was advised that he should take the money of Ansalon the Jew. He sent for him and said, 'Ansalon, I have sent for you to tell me what Faith (Law) is the best, yours or mine, or that of the Christians?' Now, Saladin had it in mind that if the Jew should praise his own religion he would say, 'You are insulting mine,' and in like manner, if the Jew should praise the Christian religion, and if he should give blame to his own, he (Saladin) would hold him a traitor to Judaism, and thus in any case determined to deprive him of his money. Ansalon wisely replied, 'The answer must be the same as that of the rich nobleman who had a valuable ring, and being at the point of death, each of his three sons desiring to have it, secretly begged it of him. The father was minded to give it to the

oldest, but the others, by their deceptive words and by putting before him their reasons why they should have the ring, tried to persuade him to give it to them, and he was unable to give them denial. He accordingly had two other rings made exactly resembling the true one, but of no value, and had them placed in two boxes exactly alike, and calling his sons before him he gave to each one separately a ring, so that each believed he had received the true ring, but only one had it, and this one was designated his heir.

In like manner there are three notable Faiths, the one yours, another mine, the third that of the Christians. One is the real one and the others are naught; which is which I do not know, but the adherents of each of these three religions believes his to be the only true one, as the three sons each believed he possessed the true ring.'

Saladin, hearing this, changed his mind and released the Jew."

Attention might here be called to the allegory in Swift's "Tale of a Tub", wherein the incident of a father presenting each of his three sons with a new coat is plainly a satire on the Church of Rome, Protestantism and Dissenters, without any reference to the truth of any particular religion.

It will be perceived that Busone's narrative is substantially identical with the one in the *Novelle,* which he embellishes here and there not without offense to good taste. All things considered, the form in which we find it in the "Decameron" appears to be the most acceptable. In the "Novelle", it is very curtly stated

that the Sultan was in financial difficulties, whereas, in Busone's version, money is needed for war against the Christians. In Boccaccio, the emptiness of the treasury is due to his love of luxury and campaigns, but it is not clearly indicated for what purpose he has further need of funds. In the "Novelle", no attempt is made to excuse the plunder of the Jew, while Busone mentions the fact that the Jews are everywhere despised, which furnishes a motive. Boccaccio is too tolerant to make use of this motive and pictures the Jew, Melchizedek, as a miserly usurer, in order to exonerate the Sultan for his design. In the "Novelle", the person of the Jew is of no consequence. He serves merely as an incident in the recital. In Busone and Boccaccio, on the other hand, one is subtly prejudiced against him, to justify the Sultan's crafty procedure. In the "Novelle", the Jew is confronted with the embarrassing alternative of choosing between the Jewish and Mohammedan religions; although a general query as to which religion is the best is propounded by the monarch. It is notable that in his answer the Jew mentions also the Christian religion. In one edition, he says: "I say the same of all three religions. Our heavenly Father knows which is the best. The sons, that is to say, we, believe that each of us possesses the best." In another version, both in the printed and manucript copies, he is credited with saying: "This much I will say, gracious master, that I know it not either and, therefore, cannot tell you." The presentation in the "Novelle" is much more probable than that in Busone and Boccaccio,

where the Sultan asks the Jew which of the three religions is the best. The "Novelle" speaks only of the Sultan and does not mention the Jew by name, whereas in the other two accounts, the Sultan of Babylon and Jews with biblical names are specifically indicated. The former uses the word "faith"; the latter the word "law", for religion. In the former, the Jew applies his parable to the three religions by inference only; while, in the latter, he makes his point clearly and distinctively.

It is interesting to note, in passing, that in the "Novelle" the story runs to 230 words; in Busone to 100 more; and in the "Decameron", it is expanded to 740.

A very curious tale, somewhat analogous to our parable, exemplifying Saladin's indecision in matters of religion, may be read in Jans Enenkel's *Weltbuch* (1190-1251), quoted by Landau and by A. C. Lee, in his exhaustive study on "The Decameron: its Sources and Analogues" (London, 1909), to both of whom we are indebted for much valuable information as to parallels. This mediaeval chronicler relates that Saladin, having almost impoverished himself by his generosity [a trait strikingly brought out in the Lessing drama], became dangerously ill. On being told by his physicians that he could not live, he became very sorrowful and anxious for his soul. He thought if he embraced Mohammedanism he would be scorning Christianity, the faith of the people who held their God as the most powerful, whilst at the same time the Jews thought the same of their God. Finally, he

decided to give his soul to the Deity that would afford him the greatest protection. He had also a most valuable table, made of a large sapphire, which he desired to dispose of in the same way, but as he was unable to arrive at a decision on the point, he had the table divided into three parts and bequeathed a part to each of the three Churches—the Christian, the Mohammedan and the Jewish—saying: "the one that is the most powerful will assist me."

An exclusively Christian coloring is given to a similar parable, to be found in the eighty-ninth chapter of the celebrated collection of monkish tales, entitled *Gesta Romanorum,* dating presumably, from the first half of the thirteenth century, although they did not receive their present form until two hundred years later.

It is here recorded that a Knight had three sons, to the oldest of whom he left his estate, while the second received a treasure and the third a costly ring, exceeding all the others in value. He gave to each of the two older sons two rings similar to the genuine original. Upon the father's death, the sons began to quarrel over the genuineness of the rings. In order to ascertain which was the original gift, each decided to put its power to the test. The results showed that the ring of the youngest son had the art of curing all diseases, whereas those of the older brothers possessed no magical properties. The moral appended to this tale is thus expounded: "The judge is God; the estate of the oldest son is the Holy Land, which the Jews possess; the second son's treasure represents the

temporal glory of the Saracens; but the ring of the youngest son is the Christian religion, which can heal all diseases and move mountains."

It is now generally accepted that the oldest Christian source of the parable is found in the work of Etienne de Bourbon, a Dominican monk, who died about 1261, entitled "The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit."

"I have heard", he says, "from a wise man this example of the demonstration of the true faith. A rich man had a ring in which was set a precious stone that had the virtue of curing all maladies. He had a wife who had given him one legitimate daughter. Later on, *'corrupta a leonibus'*, she gave birth to several others that passed for legitimate children without being so. He, however, was not ignorant of the truth, and dying left a will bequeathing the ring to his legitimate daughter and his property to her who should have this ring. Calling his daughter to him, he gave her this ring and died. The other children, knowing this, had similar rings made. When the will was opened before the judge, each one showed her ring and claimed to be the legitimate daughter, but the judge being a wise man, caused the healing qualities of the ring to be tested, and finding none in two of them, awarded the inheritance to the daughter whose ring had proved itself to be the true one. It is to be inferred from this narrative that it is the Christian religion that is symbolized by the true ring, although no actual reference is made to the different religions.

An almost contemporaneous variant is the French poem *Li dis dou vrai aniel* (elsewhere styled, *Dit du vrai anneau*), composed somewhere between 1270 and 1299, and edited by Adolph Tobler, from a Paris MS., in 1871.

Here the story is of a valiant and good man who lived in Egypt and had three sons, the two oldest of dissolute life, the youngest being a saintly man. This father had a ring which had the art of healing all disease and of restoring the dead to life. He had two other rings made by a jeweler exactly like the first one. On his death-bed he gives a ring to each of his sons, the true one to the youngest, to whom he revealed its secret powers. On the father's demise each son claimed to be in possession of the true ring, which, however, on their being put to the proof, is found to be in the keeping of the youngest son.

The author of this notable version, which presents so striking a resemblance to the original of the Italian novelists, shows in conclusion that the three rings are symbolical of the Christian, Mohammedan and Jewish religions, the first being the only true one.

It is quite evident that both of these accounts are derived from a common source, namely the *Gesta Romanorum,* the authorship of which, though still obscure, is generally accredited to a Benedictine prior, Petrus Berchorius, who died at Paris, 1362.

In the long list of analogues, we find, in the *Arabian Nights,* the story of the Sultan who had a ring, which was regarded as the symbol of the caliphate. When his brother demanded it, Haroun al Rashid, the mon-

Facsimile of a page of the first draft of the Poem, in possession of a member of the Mendelssohn family in Berlin.

arch in question, cast it into the Tigris. Upon the brother's death, the monarch threw a leaden ring into the river, and the divers brought the genuine original back to him.

A legend identical in some respects with our own, is said to be found in an Arabic work of the early Middle Ages, entitled *Nuzhetol-Udeba.* The germ of the parable is also contained in Thaalabi's Arabic *History of the Persian Kings,* composed about 1017-22. A Persian king gives to each of his three favorite slaves a costly ring, by means of which they are to recognize which of them he loves the most. This, however, presents merely a curious variant, and it is possible that the author suppressed the natural application which we have in the accepted versions.

In the first-named Oriental parallel, it is related that a Christian, a Mohammedan and a Jew, who traveled together, found a small loaf of bread, which scarcely sufficed for any one of them. They decided that it should belong to him who would have the most singular dream. The Mohammedan dreams that he is in heaven, the Christian that he is in hell, and the Jew very properly eats the bread while the other two are asleep. This curious narrative is likewise borrowed from the *Gesta Romanorum* and has its counterpart in a story in the *Disciplina Clericalis,* or "A Training School for the Clergy", one of the most popular collection of tales of the Middle Ages, composed by Petrus Alfonsi (1062 to 1110), physician-in-ordinary to King Alfonso of Castile, who embraced Christianity in his forty-fifth year and whose work is a rich mine for all students of folklore.

It is clear that Boccaccio intended his account to be a satire against the monkish order, about whose doings he, more than any of his predecessors, has written with keen relish and irresistible humor. Busone tells, in one of his stories, that Saladin, in the course of his journey through Europe, visited Rome and when he perceived the vices of the high dignitaries of the church, he said:

"The priests do exactly what they should not do, and avarice has become second nature to them. But the offenses and crimes of the Pope, the Cardinals and the Roman courtiers prove to me conclusively that the Christian religion is the best of all, for the Supreme Being who can tolerate such insults is assuredly the most gracious and compassionate. I clearly perceive that the God of the Christians is undoubtedly the kindest and most long-suffering, for another God would not permit such actions on the part of his followers. It, therefore, appears that Christianity is the best of all religions."

Boccaccio makes of this short anecdote one of the best novels of his whole collection. With wonderful skill Busone's narrative is shorn of its blasphemy, only to make the charge against the clergy all the more caustic and irrefutable. He depicts the Jew as an honest and pious creature, in order to convince us of the sincerity of his naive conclusion. That he makes the Jew, instead of Saladin, the teller of the story has a very beneficial effect. Although the fable of the Sultan's journey through Europe was universally credited in the fourteenth century, it should

be noted that more than a hundred years had elapsed since the monarch's death. Boccaccio, however, whose purpose was to chastise the corrupt clergy of his day, could not very well set back his story and was obliged to parade Saladin as a leading figure. Had he simply substituted a Mohammedan, his narrative would not have had the interest and probability that it has in its present form, for it speaks of a Jew with whom the Italians of his time had the opportunity of coming into daily contact.

It may be mentioned that Benvenuto Rambaldi of Imola, in his Commentary to Dante's "Divine Comedy", mentions the parable, suggesting the inference that he and Boccaccio derived it from a common source. However, Rambaldi was Boccaccio's pupil, so that it is quite natural to suppose that he was familiar with his master's work, as indeed is apparent from the use he makes of other stories in the "Decameron".

The tale has passed into other Italian, French and German collections of a later date, notably facetiae, a number of which are mentioned in some detail by Lee, in his painstaking work on the *Decameron* (London, 1909). The bibliography on the subject is so extensive as to require a separate investigation.

In a note to the English translation of the "Decameron", reference is made to an anonymous work, of the authorship of which Boccaccio has been accused, entitled, *De Tribus Impostoribus,* composed in the sixteenth century, frequently published, concerning which there has been much controversy. There,

as in numerous similar controversial works, notably in Jean Bodin's very remarkable *Colloquium heptaplomeres* (XVIc), where the Jew is given preferential treatment, in a discussion with six other personages of various faiths, the three religions are compared, but it is not stated whether the parable is mentioned. The great Jewish bibliographer, Moritz Steinschneider, has written a very exhaustive treatise on the "Polemic and Apologetic Literature in the Arabic language between Moslems, Christians and Jews", based, primarily, on manuscript sources, and published in Leipsic, 1877, which gives a complete analysis of the whole subject of controversy between the three leading religions. It is a work of stupendous industry, covering 470 pages, which should be studied in connection with our theme.

The editor's note, in the English version of Boccaccio, further states that this particular novel probably originated in some rabbinical tradition. That his surmise is correct will be proven in the sequel.

It is not generally known that there are two singularly close parallels to our story, in Jewish literature. The first account is taken from a work by Solomon Ibn Verga, a Spanish historian and physician, who lived in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and whose *Shebet Yehudah* contains an account of sixty-four persecutions of the Jews and narrates many religious disputations. It was first printed in Turkey about 1550 and has been translated into several modern languages. While the historical value of the data contained in his book has been seriously questioned

by scholars, and it is assumed that the account of some of the controversies he gives is fictitious, there are valuable traditions preserved in it which make it of prime importance to students of history and folklore. The author knew Latin and derived much of his material from secular sources. It is quite conceivable that the story he tells was current in his day and may with propriety be credited as dating from the early part of the twelfth century.

As it presents a somewhat novel setting and brings before us another enlightened monarch, whose broad tolerance in matters of religion is worth noting, we feel justified in giving the passages which directly interest us in full, especially since the text is not readily accessible to the ordinary reader:—

A disputation once took place between King Don Pedro, the Elder, and Nicholas the Wise, of Valencia. The latter said: "I understand, Sire, that it is thy gracious will to proceed against the infidel, who are thine enemies. But, why does our monarch war against foes from without and neglect measures against those within, namely, the Jews, whose hatred toward us is so intense that it is enjoined in their Scriptures that they may not even greet us?* I have heard from one who knew this people well that when a Jew meets a Christian, he exclaims: 'I salute thee, my Lord; may God protect thee!' But, upon leaving him, he utters imprecations against him."

*Many statements may be adduced from the Rabbinical writings to prove the falsity of these malicious charges. Suffice it to refer to a passage in the **Mishnah, Abot** 4, 20, where it is distinctly said that one is obliged to give a friendly salutation to every man.

"Hast thou heard this with thine own ears?" demanded the King.

"Verily," rejoined Nicholas. "I have this from the mouth of one who came over to our faith."

The King: "One who changes his religion cannot be believed, for it is an easy matter for him to change his words as well. Furthermore, the hatred which is expressed, by reason of a difference in faith, is immaterial, inasmuch as only the love for one's own is intended to be emphasized."

Nicholas: "Nothing angers me more than the insolence of those who have the temerity to cast into thy face the charge that thy religious convictions are false."

The King: "Well then, let a Jewish sage be summoned, whom we shall question."

When the Jew was brought into his presence, asked the King: "What is thy name?"

"Ephraim ben Sancho," answered the Jew.

"It appears that thou hast two distinct names. Ephraim stamps thee a Jew and Sancho a Christian."

Thereupon rejoined the Jew: "My Lord and Sire, Sancho is my family name."

"Did I desire kinship with thee, that thou givest me thy family name?" said the King.

The Jew: "My Lord and King, I merely added Sancho as a means of identification, since there are many here who bear the name of Ephraim, and it seemed that it was the wish of my Lord and King to know who I was, in that he has graciously inquired after my name."

"Let us dismiss the subject!" said the King. "Thou hast been brought into my presence to furnish testimony as to which of the two religions be the better, the Christian or thine own."

The sage replied: "My religion is better for me, in view of my present circumstances, since I was once

a slave in Egypt, and the Almighty hath rescued me by signs and miracles. Thy religion, however, is better for thee, since it is the dominant one."

"But I am concerned chiefly with the religions themselves and not with their professors," answered the King.

"By the King's gracious leave, I will deliberate upon this problem three days and will then render decision," replied the Jew.

The King granted this, and, at the expiration of the time, the sage returned, but seemed to be restive and downcast. To the monarch's query: "Why art thou so dispirited?" he replied:

"They have scorned me to-day, without cause, since I have committed no wrong, and it now rests with thee, Sire, to probe into the matter. A month ago, one of my neighbors went on a journey, leaving a precious stone to each of his two sons, as a parting gift, and now the brothers appealed to me to explain to them the peculiar properties of these jewels and to tell them wherein each differs from the other. When I declared that no one could know their value better than their own father, since he is an expert appraiser of such treasures, being a jeweller, and that it is to him that they should turn for counsel, they smote me savagely and ridiculed me for my advice."

"They have certainly done wrong," replied the King, "and they deserve to be punished."

"So may thine own ears, O Sire, accept what Thy mouth hath expressed. Behold, Esau and Jacob are also brothers, to each of whom was bequeathed a precious stone, and now, our gracious monarch demands which is the better. May it please him to dispatch a messenger to our Father in Heaven, for He is the greatest jeweler and He alone can judge the difference in the stones."

"Perceivest thou, O Nicholas, the cleverness of

the Jews?" exclaimed the King. "Verily, such a sage deserves to be laden with gifts and to be honored in a high degree. As for thee, thou must suffer penalty for giving false testimony against the Jewish race."

"Be that as it may," said Nicholas, "it has always been the custom of our sacred monarchs to make all religions subordinate to their own. Wherefore actest thou differently?"

"Never have I seen a thing succeed through force," rejoined the King, "for, just as soon as pressure relaxes, it reverts to its former condition, just as a stone which is thrown into the air necessarily falls back to earth. . . . . Therefore, I counsel thee, use no force with this people. Perhaps, thou mayest be able to achieve something with them by patient teaching and constant admonition, for, if the drop of water makes an impression upon the hardest marble, how much deeper impression can the gentle tongue make upon the soft heart of flesh!"

As Pedro of Aragon reigned from 1094 to 1104, the date of its composition, if the authenticity of the episode is to be unquestioned, is definitely determined. In this narrative, too, it is again a Jew who cleverly eludes the trap so adroitly laid for him by his royal master. It is a significant circumstance and goes far to prove the contention of some writers, that even if the actual occurrence did not take place, the parable must have originated among the Jews, or else the Jew would not so persistently played so wise and important a role. It is further argued that if the other versions, in which a Mohammedan is the questioner, were older, the later Jewish sources would not have made him a Christian prince; whereas, in the Christian variants

of the story, it is quite natural to find a Saracen, in place of a Christian, taking the leading part.

The legend was undoubtedly extensively circulated among the Jews at a very early period, even though it may not have appeared in the form in which we find it in Ibn Verga's work. As Busone was a friend of the noted Jewish poet Manoello, who was also acquainted with Dante, it seems plausible to assume that it is from him that the Italian romancer received the tradition, which directly influenced Boccaccio and, incidentally, other writers.

Dr. M. Wiener, the editor of the *Shebet Yehudah*, in a separate article on the origin of the parable, maintains that the Hebrew version is the oldest, in point of historical correctness, and that it is ethically the most valuable of all analogues. The same claim is made by a French writer, Gaston Paris, in an elaborate essay on the subject, and, as he is an eminent folklorist, his conclusions should carry considerable weight.

The second Hebrew parallel is equally remarkable and distinctive. It is to be found in an unpublished work from the pen of the celebrated mystic, Abraham Abulafia (1240 to about 1291), entitled *Or ha-Sekel*, or "The Light of Reason". In arguing the superiority of Israel as a nation, he applies the following parable:

"There was a man who had in his possession a costly pearl which he desired to bequeath to his son. He, therefore, taught him the uses of wealth, so that he would be able to recognize the value of this pearl and esteem it as great a treasure as his father. While

engaged in demonstrating this, the son provoked his father. What did the father do? He did not wish to hand the pearl over to another man lest his son lose his inheritance, in case he repented and became reconciled to him; he, therefore, threw it into a cistern, for, argued he, 'Should my son not repent, I would not have him inherit it; but should he repent, I would not have him lose it; hence, while he remains unrepentant, let it be hidden away in my cistern; but as soon as he recants, I will immediately fetch it for him.'

Now, during the whole time that the son remained obdurate, the father's slaves came to him, day after day, and taunted him, each boasting that the master had given him the pearl. But the son, from lack of prudence, gave no heed. After a while, however, they aroused him to such a point that he repented, whereupon his father forgave him and brought up the pearl out of the cistern and presented it to his son. When the slaves saw this, they at once fell upon their faces and were ashamed of their lies before the son, being hard put to in obtaining his pardon.

Even so did it transpire with us respecting the nations that tell us that God had substituted them for us. For, so long as we fail to conciliate God in the things wherein we have sinned against him, we have no answer to give them; but when we repent and He restores our captivity, those that seek to shame us will themselves be put to shame. But because we to-day have not as yet reached the high estate which we hope some day to attain, the dispute continues.

To whom does the jewel of truth belong; to us or to our adversaries? Until the Arbiter comes and lifts the pearl out of the pit and restores it to His son; and then the truth will be made clear, and the treasure will be surrendered to its rightful owners, called the People of God; then jealousy and strife will cease . . . and each member of the human race will realize the universal brotherhood of man."

We have here an apologetic form of the classical story, held to be the oldest-known parallel by Steinschneider and other investigators. In the epilogue, it is inferred that the repentant son is Israel and the servants are Christians and Moslems. The other Hebrew account is of a later date.

Professor Victor Chauvin, the Belgian orientalist, who resides in the ill-fated city of Liege, ventures to ask: "whether this miserable anecdote, as badly invented as told, has even a shadow of resemblance to the parable of the three rings. To assume that it has, is to ignore the conspicuous fact that without the antithesis of the true ring and the false, there can be no parable." Inasmuch as he had discovered what he calls the germ of the parable in Thaalabi's Arabic "History of the Persian Kings", written in the eleventh century, where the author speaks of three *genuine* rings, without any antithesis or application to religion at all, the story given in Abulafia's narrative, which tells of *one* treasure and of three religions—the two rejected pretenders having not the slightest claim to recognition—affords a far more striking parallel than his own. The Hebrew author's version furnishes an

older phase of the simile, and his presentation is not irrational, if one studies it closely. To be sure, Abulafia, who flourished about 1290, was a fanatical Cabbalist, who had presumed to convert the Pope and had just managed to escape with his life. His story properly belongs in the realm of polemics and takes its place in the history of controversy between the three religions.

It might be said, in conclusion, that the argument that all the three rings are *genuine* and its application to the three dominant religions is probably a product of the Crusades, and the meaning of the parable is to be sought only in that application and not in the trick of illusion, which may be a very old element in folklore.

The quaint story recorded in an old Hebrew polemical work against Christianity, entitled *Nizzahon* (Victory), generally supposed to have been written by a German, in the thirteenth century, at a time when the Tartars played an important role and Palestine was still the scene of bloody battles, is of interest to us as showing that the idea of comparing the three religions became current in Germany at so early a period. This work was known to the great humanist Reuchlin and was edited, with a Latin translation, by the Christian-Hebrew scholar Wagenseil, a personal friend of several noted rabbis of his time (Altdorf 1681). As the apologue is quoted, as a remote parallel, by no less an authority than Steinschneider, it may here be summarized, especially as it is not otherwise mentioned in any of the numerous books and monographs on the origin of Lessing's *"Nathan"*:

"An emperor wished to ascertain which was the most lofty and praiseworthy of all religions, the Jewish, the Christian or the Mohammedan. Accordingly, he summoned a member of each of these faiths and had them separately incarcerated. Then he went to each in turn and endeavored to persuade him to change his faith in favor of either of the others, under penalty of immediate death. The first one he appealed to was the Jew, and he enjoined him to choose either the Christian or the Mohammedan faith, or else he would forthwith perish.

The Jew replied: 'Heaven forbid that I should forsake my God and Creator, my Rock, the living God, the King of the World, and that I should cleave to a strange faith. Know that I would cheerfully endure a thousand deaths, one after the other, and still remain steadfast for the Law of our God and for the glorification of His Holy name.'

When the emperor saw that he could not prevail against him and could not move him from his resolve, he had him carried to a grave prepared for him, and ordered the guard to place his sharpened sword on his neck to intimidate and distress him, but he failed in his design, for the Jew remained obdurate. Seeing this, the emperor released him and went to the Christian priest, whom he held prisoner, and besought him, under penalty of death, to forsake the Church and to designate whether he wished to become a Jew or a Mohammedan. The priest volubly protested that he preferred to remain loyal to his creed. He wept and supplicated the emperor to permit him to remain loyal to Christian-

ity, which is the only truly exalted faith, maintaining that Jesus had suffered martyrdom to redeem him and other sinners like himself, that he might bring them into the Kingdom of Heaven. The emperor, becoming enraged, bade him cut short his words and come to a rapid decision, offering him life if he chose either of the other creeds, but instant death should he decline. When the priest saw that the monarch was determined to execute his threat, he soon let it be known that he preferred life to a miserable death and said: 'Since, Sire, you insist upon my change of faith, I would far rather become a Jew than a Moslem, for there is neither benefit nor substance in the Mohammedan faith, and the Jewish religion is far more exalted.'

Thereupon, the emperor left him abruptly and repaired to the Mohammedan, whom he had caused to be cast into prison, and enjoined him, as he did the others, to chose between the Jewish and the Christian faiths, if he would save his life. The Mohammedan became hysterical, and, with tears streaming from his eyes, pleaded with the emperor thus: 'Why, O Sire, do you wish to tear me from my own people and force me to embrace an alien faith, since mine is the only true, pure and righteous one, and no other can be compared to it in excellence?' The emperor, moved to wrath, ordered the executioner to brandish the sword, whereupon the terrified Arab implored respite until the morning, so that he might compose his conscience and make his choice. This the monarch granted. In the morning, he ex-

claimed, in a loud voice: 'The God of Abraham, my Father, is the God of Ishmael. Israel alone is the perfect rock.' He continued to sing the praises of the Jewish faith, in extravagant terms, couching his panegyric in rhymed prose and registering an oath that he was now ready to become an Israelite.

When the emperor perceived that the Jew was eager to go to his death rather than to abandon the faith of his Fathers, and that both the priest and the Arab were willing to adopt the Jewish religion, he was so impressed, that he forthwith became a proselyte to Judaism, together with his Christian and Mohammedan prisoners."

This narrative is strongly reminiscent of the account of the conversion of the Chazars, a kingdom established in South Russia long before the foundation of the Russian monarchy (855), whose sovereign, named Bulan, and his people are said to have embraced Judaism either in the seventh or eighth century. Bulan invited the wise men of Israel to a conference to meet the representatives of the Christian and Moslem faiths and proceeded to examine them all. As each of the champions believed his religion to be the best, Bulan separately questioned the Christian and the Mohammedan as to which of the other two religions they considered the best. When both gave preference to that of the Jews, the king perceived that this must be the true religion. He, therefore, adopted it and caused all his people to become Jews likewise.

Up to within recent years, the genuineness of this historic event, which is substantially corroborated by

numerous authorities, has been questioned, but the discovery of important documents, held to be authentic by scholars, conclusively proves the accuracy of this episode, one of the most romantic and significant events in Jewish history. Undoubtedly, the story recorded by the German-Hebrew author of the fourteenth century, is merely an echo of the classical account of the conversion of King Bulan and the Chazars.

* * * * *

A great poet and humanist of Germany, Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), who once wrote so appreciatively of the "Spirit of Hebrew Poetry", has this to say about Lessing's famous parable:

"About a fable of three rings is entwined the dramatic legend, a splendid wreath of doctrines of the noblest kind, designed to teach brotherhood and racial and religious tolerance. In every party strife and religious dissension; in the most unusual situations, brought about by destiny, this wreath will be woven by many different hands. In the end all must heed the highest mandate of a new destiny: 'O ye nations, bear with one another! Ye men of various opinions, customs and character, help one another; tolerate one another; be human!'"

NATHAN THE WISE

PERSONS REPRESENTED

THE SULTAN SALADIN.
SITTAH, *his Sister.*
NATHAN, *a wealthy Jew of Jerusalem.*
RECHA, *his adopted Daughter.*
DAYA, *a Christian woman residing in the house of Nathan as companion to Recha.*
A young Knight-Templar.
AL HAFI, *a Dervish.*
The Patriarch of Jerusalem.
A Lay Brother of a Convent in Jerusalem.
An Emir in the service of the Sultan.
Mamelukes of the Sultan.

The Scene is at Jerusalem.

Nathan der Weiſe.

Ein

Dramatiſches Gedicht,

in fünf Aufzügen.

Intreite, nam et heic Dii ſunt!

APVD GELLIVM.

Von

Gotthold Ephraim Leſſing.

1779.

Facsimile of Title-Page of the First Edition of NATHAN THE WISE.

[The only copy of the original Prospectus, printed at Wolfenbüttel, August 8, 1778, is in possession of Herr Justizrat Carl Robert Lessing in Berlin.]

NATHAN THE WISE

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*Entrance-hall of* NATHAN'S *house.* NATHAN *just returned from a journey.* DAYA *meeting him.*

DAYA.[1]

'Tis he—'tis Nathan!—God be thanked indeed
That now at last you are restored to us!

NATHAN.

Ay, Daya, thanked be God—but why 'at last'?
Did I then propose sooner to return;
Or *could* I have come sooner?—Babylon
Lies from Jerusalem good ten score leagues
As I perforce have had to shape my way,
Diverging now to right and now to left;
And gathering in of debts is no such task
As specially promotes the trader's speed,
Or can be settled in a moment's time.

DAYA.

Oh Nathan, oh what misery the while
Might have o'ertaken you! Your house——

[1]See Note 2.

NATHAN.

Took fire—
Ay, that I have already heard; God grant
That I've already heard the worst of it.

DAYA.

Well might it have been utterly consumed.

NATHAN.

In that case, Daya, we'd have built ourselves
A new one, and a better.

DAYA.

Ay, that's true;
But oh, our Recha was within an ace
Of burning with it!

NATHAN.

Who?—my Recha? Nay,
I had not heard of *that*. In such a case,
I ne'er had needed house. Within an ace
Of being burned to death! Ha! out with it;
She's burned indeed—confess she's burned to death;
Kill me, but torture me no more. She's burned!

DAYA.

If so, would you have heard it from *my* lips?

NATHAN.

Then why appal me thus? Oh Recha dear;
Oh my own Recha!

DAYA.

Recha *yours*—your own?

NATHAN.

Oh may I never have to wean my tongue
From calling her my own!

DAYA.

Call you all else
That you possess, your own with no more right?

NATHAN.

Nought surely with a better right; all else
That I possess hath been bestowed on me
By nature or by chance; this prize alone
I owe to virtue.

DAYA.

Nathan, what a price
You make me pay for all your benefits;
If benefits conferred for such an end
Deserve the name!

NATHAN.

For such an end?—what end?

DAYA.

My conscience whispers——

NATHAN.

Daya, before all,
Hear me describe——

DAYA.

My conscience, I repeat——

NATHAN.

Hear me describe the dainty stuff I bought
For you in Babylon, so rich, so choice
For Recha's self scarce bring I aught more rare.

DAYA.

What boots it, Nathan, since my conscience now
Refuses any longer to be hushed.

NATHAN.

And then I long to see your ecstasy
When you behold the bracelets and the ring,
The ear-rings and the chain I chose for you
As I passed through Damascus.

DAYA.

Ay, just so,
'Tis just like you—for ever raining gifts.

NATHAN.

Take freely as I give, and say no more.

DAYA.

What—say no more?—Who, Nathan, doubts
That you are generosity and honor's self;
And yet——

NATHAN.

I'm nothing better than a Jew;
That's what you mean to say.

DAYA.

Nay, what I mean
You know full well——

NATHAN.

No more of it.

DAYA.

Well then,
Whate'er you do that's penal before God,
And I can neither alter nor prevent,
Be it upon *your* head.

NATHAN.

E'en be it so.
But, Daya, where is she; where lingers she?
Oh, if you have deceived me! Knows she yet
That I am come?

DAYA.

How can you ask me this?
As yet she quivers in her every nerve;
As yet her fancy pictures fire alone
In every image of her brain; in sleep
Her spirit wakes, and when she wakes it sleeps;
At times she seems less than a sentient thing,
Anon more than an angel.

NATHAN.

Ah, poor child.
How frail a thing is man!

DAYA.

This morn she lay
Long with her eyelids closed and seemed as dead;

Sudden she started up and cried, 'Hark, hark!
I hear the camels of my father's train,
Ay, and his own dear kindly voice;' meanwhile
Her eye grew fixed again, and then her head,
Deserted now by her supporting hand,
Sank on the pillow. Hastening to the door,
I saw you coming—coming of a truth!
No wonder she divined it; all the time
Her soul hath dwelt on you and him.

NATHAN.

And him?
What him?

DAYA.

On him who plucked her from the flames.

NATHAN.

Ay, who might that be—who and where is he?
Where is the man who saved my Recha's life?

DAYA.

'Twas a young Templar who, some days before,
Spared by the clemency of Saladin,
Had been brought hither as a captive.[1]

NATHAN.

How!
A Templar, say you, and a Templar spared
By Saladin! Could Recha not be saved
By any smaller miracle than this!

[1]See Note 3.

DAYA.

Yet but for him, who boldly staked afresh
The life which lately had been spared to him,
She surely must have perished.

NATHAN.

Daya, say,
Where is he—where's the noble, generous man?
Lead me without delay unto his feet.
Oh tell me that you gave him on the spot
Whate'er of wealth I left you—gave him all,
And promised more—far more

DAYA.

How could we do't?

NATHAN.

You did it not!

DAYA.

He came, no man knows whence;
He went, no man knows whither. Destitute
Of all acquaintance with our house, he dashed,
Led by his ear alone, through smoke and flame,
Screened by his mantle, till he reached the spot
Where Recha shrieked for help. We deemed him lost,
When lo! emerging from the blazing pile,
He stood before us, on his stalwart arm
Bearing our darling. Cold, and all unmoved
By our acclaim of thanks, he laid her down,
Passed through the throng of gaping witnesses,
And vanished.

NATHAN.

Not for ever, let us hope.

DAYA.

The first few following days he could be seen
Wandering up and down beneath the palms
Which yonder shade our risen Saviour's tomb.
With heartfelt rapture I approached his side,
Thanked him, extolled his valor, and conjured
That he would look at least once more upon
The grateful creature who could never rest
Until she might weep out her gratitude
Before his feet.

NATHAN.

What then?

DAYA.

'Twas all in vain;
To all our fond entreaties he was deaf;
And vented upon me such bitter taunts——

NATHAN.

That you recoiled in fear?

DAYA.

Nay, far from that;
For daily I accosted him afresh,
And every day I bore his taunts anew.
What brooked I not from him, what would I not
Most willingly have brooked? But now for long
He comes no more to roam beneath the palms
Which cast their shade on our Redeemer's tomb,

And none can tell where he is hidden now.
You start—you ponder——

NATHAN.

Nay, I but reflect
How an adventure such as this must work
Upon a heart like Recha's—spurned like this;
At once attracted and repelled by him
She's bound to prize so highly—of a truth,
Her heart must be in conflict with her head,
To say which sentiment should now prevail,
Tender regret, or hatred of the man.
Neither may triumph, then sheer fantasy,
Sharing the strife, may breed a dreamy mood,
Reasoning now with heart and now with head—
Evil alternative!—unless I wrong
My Recha, such will haply be her case;
She'll wax a dreamer——

DAYA.

But she is so good,
So lovable!

NATHAN.

A dreamer none the less.

DAYA.

Well, if you will, there *is* a special whim
Most dear to her. She holds the Templar is
No human being, no mere thing of earth,
But one of those blest angels to whose ward
Her childish heart from infancy was fain
To think she was entrusted; and that he,

Rending the clouds in which he veils himself,
And hovering o'er her even in the fire,
Did suddenly assume the Templar's form,
And stand beside her—smile not; who can tell?
Or, spite your smiles, let her at least enjoy
A sweet delusion of a kind that's shared
Alike by Christian, Mussulman, and Jew.

NATHAN.

Sweet to me too. Go, honest Daya, go,
See what she does—I fain would speak with her—
And then I'll seek this guardian-angel out,
Who seems so wild and freaky; deigns he still
To wander here below with us, and yet
To wear his knightship in so rude a guise,
I'll find him out for sure, and bring him here.

DAYA.

You're undertaking much.

NATHAN.

If, after all,
The sweet delusion yield to sweeter truth—
And, trust me, Daya, to a human heart
A man's more dear than e'er an angel is—
You will not chide or rail on me at least
When you shall see our angel-doter cured.

DAYA.

You are so good, and yet so trickish too!
I go—but mark—see there—she comes herself.

SCENE II.—RECHA *and the Preceding.*

RECHA.

So, father, it is you, in very sooth;
Methought you'd haply sent your voice alone
To herald you. Why halt you now; what hills,
What deserts, or what torrents part us still?
You breathe within the self-same walls with me,
And yet you haste not to embrace your child;
Poor Recha who was nearly burnt alive;
Ay, nearly, only nearly burnt; so shudder not—
Oh, 'twere a loathly death to burn alive!

NATHAN.

My child! my darling child!

RECHA.

You had to cross
Euphrates, Tigris, Jordan, and who knows
What other mighty streams—how oft have I
Trembled before you, before the fiery death
So nearly grazed my being; but since then
A watery death seems by comparison
A pleasure, a refreshment, a delight.
And yet you are not drowned nor am I burned,
How we will now rejoice, and thank the Lord;
He surely bore you and your crazy bark
On his invisible angels' blessed wings
Across the traitorous streams, and the same God
Beckoned *my* angel that in patent shape
He should uplift me on his snow-white wing
And bear me through the flames.

NATHAN (*to himself*).

His snow-white wing!
Ay, ay, she means the Templar's snow-white robe,
Outspread before him——

RECHA.

Yes, in patent shape
He bore me safely through the raging flames,
Fanned harmless from me by his kindly wings,
Ay, I have seen an angel face to face,
My guardian angel.

NATHAN.

Recha of a truth
Were worthy of an angel-visitor,
Nor could she view in him a fairer form
Than he in her.

RECHA (*smiling*).

Whom would you flatter now,
The angel or yourself?[1]

NATHAN.

Yet had a man,
A common man of nature's daily stamp,
Vouchsafed this service to you, he had loomed
An angel in your eyes—he must and would.

RECHA.

Not such a one—oh, no; this was in truth
A veritable angel,—you yourself

[1]See Note 4.

Have ever taught me that such Beings are,
And that our heavenly Father wonders works
In their behalf who love His holy name,
And sure I love it.

NATHAN.

Ay, and He loves *you*,
And works for you, and for the like of you,
Miracles every hour; and has done so
From all eternity.

RECHA.

I love to hear 't.

NATHAN.

And yet though it might sound but natural,
An every-day and ordinary thing,
That a mere Templar had delivered you,
Would it be any less a miracle?
To me the greatest miracle is this,[1]
That many a veritable miracle
By use and wont grows stale and commonplace.
But for this universal miracle,
A thinking man had ne'er confined the name
To those reputed miracles alone
Which startle children, ay, and older fools,
Ever agape for what is strange and new,
And out of nature's course.

DAYA.

Have you a mind
With subtle instances like this to daze
Her poor o'erheated brain?

[1]See Note 5.

NATHAN.

Nay, suffer me—
Were it not miracle enough for her
That she was rescued by a man who first
Himself was rescued by a miracle,
Ay, a prodigious one; for when before
Did Saladin e'er spare a Templar's life?
When did a Templar ask him for such grace,
Or hope for such, or tender for his life
More than the leathern girdle of his sword,
His dagger at the most?[1]

RECHA.

This argument
Tells for my case, my father, for it proves
This was no Templar save in outward form;
For if no captive Templar can approach
Jerusalem except to certain death,
If none may wander here at liberty,
How could a Templar roaming around at will
Have rescued me that night?

NATHAN.

A shrewd conceit!
Now, Daya, speak. Did not I learn from you
That he was sent here as a prisoner?
Doubtless you know still more about his case.

DAYA.

Well, it is said so, but 'tis also said
The Sultan only spared the Templar's life

[1]See Note 6.

Because he bore a strange similitude
To a loved brother of his own, now dead.
But seeing full a score of years have passed
Since the said brother died, nor do we know
Even his name, or on what field he fell,
Methinks the tale is so incredible,
That there is nothing in the whole affair.

NATHAN.

Daya, what's so incredible in this?
You surely would not flout a likely tale,
As others often do, to give your faith
To something else much more incredible,—
Saladin loves his kindred all so well,
Why should he not, then, in his younger years
Have loved some brother with a special love?
Are not two faces sometimes found alike,
And is a memory dead because 'tis old?
Since when has cause ceased to produce effect?
What find you so incredible in this?
Oh, my sage Daya, this can be to you
No whit a wonder,—'tis *your* miracles
Which make so huge a draft upon belief.

DAYA.

Mocking again!

NATHAN.

Because you're mocking me;
Yet, Recha, your deliverance remains
A wonder, possible to Him alone
Who loves to govern by the slightest threads

The firmest plans and most unbridled wills
Of kings,—His sport, if not His mockery.

RECHA.

My father, if I err, you know full well
I err not willingly.

NATHAN.

I know it well.
Nay, you are ever teachable, my child.
Look you,—a forehead with a certain arch,[1]
A nose that's chiselled in a special form,
A pair of eyebrows pencilled on a brow
Prominent or obtuse, a lineament,
A curve, a line, a dimple, or a mole,
These on a savage European face,
And lo, you're plucked from out an Asian fire!
Is *that* no marvel, marvel-seeking souls?
Why put an angel to the trouble o't?

DAYA.

Well, Nathan, if I may presume to speak,
For all you say, I'd ask you where's the harm
Of thinking that an angel rescued her,
And no mere man?—Sure thus we feel ourselves
Nearer the great inscrutable First Cause
Of our deliverance——

NATHAN.

Pride—and nought but pride!
The iron pot would fain be lifted up

[1]See Note 7.

With tongs of silver from the kitchen fire,
That it may deem itself a silver urn.
And where's the harm, you ask—the harm indeed!
Nay, rather might I ask you where's the good;
Since your pretence of feeling nearer God
Is either folly or rank blasphemy—
Ay, and such folly surely does work harm.
Come, hearken to me, and confess the truth;—
As to the being who has saved her life,
Whether it was an angel or a man,
I wot that you, and Recha more than you,
Would wish to do some service unto *him;*
Now, to an angel I would like to know
What service could ye do—thank him, perhaps;
Sigh to him, pray to him, or haply melt
In pious rapture at the thought of him;
Or you might fast upon his festival,
Spend alms in honor of him,—all in vain.
It strikes me that your neighbors and yourselves
Gain far more by your piety than he;
Your angel grows no fatter by your fasts,
Nor richer by your charitable doles,
More glorious by your pious ecstasies,
Or mightier by your faith—is that not so?
How different with a man!

DAYA.

I grant a mortal would have furnished us
More chances to requite his services,

And God knows how we yearned to do him good,
But he would absolutely nought from us,
And needed nought; serenely satisfied,
Sufficient to himself as angels are,
And only they can be.

RECHA.

And when at last
He disappeared entirely from our view——

NATHAN.

What! disappeared?—how so? beneath the palms
Was seen no more? how's this?—Belike ye've sought
To find him elsewhere.

DAYA.

Nay, we've not done that.

NATHAN.

Not done it, Daya!—Is it possible?
Now see the mischief of your foolish dreams,
Ye heartless visionaries, what if now
Your angel pines in sickness?

RECHA.

Sickness!

DAYA.

No;
That cannot be—oh no!

RECHA.

A shuddering chill

Creeps o'er me, Daya, and my brow, but now
So warm, is cold as ice.

NATHAN.

He is a Frank,
All unaccustomed to our burning clime;
He's young too and unused to all the toils,
The fasts and vigils which his Order claims.

RECHA.

But sick!

DAYA.

Nay, Nathan only would imply
That such might peradventure be his case.

NATHAN.

Ay, lying there with neither friends nor gold
To buy him friends.

RECHA.

Oh, father, say not so.

NATHAN.

Lies without tendance, sympathy, or help,
A prey to suffering, perhaps to death!

RECHA.

Where, where?

NATHAN.

He who for one he ne'er had seen,
Enough she was a mortal like himself,
Dashed 'mid the flames.

DAYA.

Nathan, be merciful.

NATHAN.

Who would not know the creature he had saved;
Would not behold her, that he thus might shun
Her very thanks!

DAYA.

Oh, spare her, I entreat!

NATHAN.

Sought not to see her more, unless it were
That he might rescue her a second time;
Enough that she was human——

DAYA.

Oh, forbear!

NATHAN.

And now has nought to soothe him in his death
Beyond the knowledge of his deed.

DAYA.

Forbear!
You're killing her.

NATHAN.

And you've been killing *him;*
Or may have done so. Oh, my Recha, hear,
'Tis wholesome physic that I give you now,
Not poison,—sure he lives—compose yourself,
Belike he is not sick—not even sick.

RECHA.

Oh, are you sure he's neither dead nor sick?

NATHAN.

Be sure he is not dead, for God rewards
E'en here below the good that men do here;
Now go, my child, but I would have you learn
That pious ecstasies are easier far
Than righteous action. Slack and feeble souls,
E'en when themselves unconscious of their case,
Are prone to godly raptures, if by these
They may eschew the toil of doing good.

RECHA.

Ah, father, leave me ne'er again alone.
And do you think perhaps he's only gone
Some otherwhere?

NATHAN.

Ay, certainly—go—go—
But who's yon Moslem who with curious eye
Scans my well-laden camels, know ye him?

DAYA.

Why, 'tis your Dervish

NATHAN.

Who?

DAYA.

Your Dervish, sure,
Your old chess partner, it is he indeed.

NATHAN.

Al Hafi,[1] mean you?—*that* is never he.

DAYA.

Ay, but he's now the Sultan's Treasurer.

NATHAN.

Al Hafi!—are you at your dreams again?
Nay, it is he in truth—he comes this way.
In with ye, quick. I wonder what he brings.

Scene III.—Nathan *and the* Dervish.

DERVISH.

Ay, ope your eyes as wide as e'er you can.

NATHAN.

Is't thou, or is it not?—in pomp like this—
A Dervish!

DERVISH.

Wherefore not—can nothing then,
Nothing at all be made of Dervishes?

NATHAN.

Oh, possibly there might; but yet I thought
Your genuine Dervish never chose that men
Should make aught of him.

[1]See Note 8.

DERVISH.

By the Prophet's beard
That I'm no genuine Dervish well may be,
But when one must——

NATHAN.

How! *must*—a Dervish *must!*
No man should must—a Dervish least of all;
What must he, then?

DERVISH.

What he's implored to do;
And what he deems it right that he should do;
Even a Dervish must do that.

NATHAN.

By heaven!
You speak the truth—come, let me hug thee, man;
I hope at least I still may call you friend.

DERVISH.

What, ere you know the thing I've now become?

NATHAN.

In spite of that.

DERVISH.

But what if I've become
A Jack-in-office, one whose friendship now
Might not be to your liking.

NATHAN.

If your heart
Be Dervish still, I'll take my chance of that;
As for your office, 'twere no more to me
Than is the suit of clothes in which you stand.

DERVISH.

Ay, but it still might claim your reverence.
What think you? guess—suppose you had a court
What had your friend Al Hafi been therein?

NATHAN.

A Dervish pure and simple—nothing more;
Or at the most then possibly my cook.

DERVISH.

To spoil my skill in serving such as you!
Your cook, forsooth! Why not your pantler too?
Now own that Saladin appraises me
More shrewdly, seeing that I've now become
His Treasurer.

NATHAN.

You Treasurer to him!

DERVISH.

I mean
I rule his privy purse; his father still
Controls the public treasury, while I
Am fiscal of his house.

NATHAN.

His house is large.

DERVISH.

Ay, and 'tis larger even than you think,
For every beggar is a member on't.

NATHAN.

Yet Saladin so hates your mendicants——

DERVISH.

That he's resolved to extirpate the breed
Both root and branch, although the task may make
A beggar of himself.

NATHAN.

That's just my thought.

DERVISH.

Nay, he is one already, just as much
As e'er another, for his store each eve
Is something worse than empty, and the flood,
Which flowed so freely in the morn, by noon
Has long since ebbed.

NATHAN.

For channels suck it up,
At least in part, to fill or stop up which
Were hopeless both alike.

DERVISH.

You've hit it there.

NATHAN.

I know it well.

DERVISH.

Ay, it is bad enough
When kings are vultures amid carcases,
But when 'mid vultures *they're* the carcases
The case is ten times worse.

NATHAN.

Oh, Dervish, no;
Not so.

DERVISH.

'Tis very well to talk, but come,
What will you give me to resign my post
In your behalf?

NATHAN.

What does your post bring in?

DERVISH.

To me not much; but it would fatten you,
For when 'tis dead low water in his chest,
As oft's the case, you'd throw your sluices wide,
Pour in your loans, and take, in usury,
As much—as much as e'er you could desire.

NATHAN.

Usury even on my usury's gains?

DERVISH.

Just so.

NATHAN.

Till all my capital became
One teeming mass of compound usury.

DERVISH.

Does that not tempt you? If not, write forthwith
Our friendship's deed of separation now;
Nathan, I counted much on you.

NATHAN.

How so,
What mean you, Dervish?

DERVISH.

That you would have helped
To make me creditably fill my post
By access to your coffers—but I see
You shake your head.

NATHAN.

Let there be no mistake,
For here a clear distinction must be drawn;
Al Hafi, Dervish, ever welcome is
To aught that Nathan can command—but mark,
Al Hafi, minister of Saladin,[1]
Who——

DERVISH.

Sure I guessed as much, and knew you were
As good as wise, as wise as you are good.
The twin Al Hafis you distinguish thus
Shall soon part company again, for see,
This robe of office Saladin bestowed,
Ere it be faded, or reduced to rags
Such as a genuine Dervish ought to wear,

[1]See Note 9.

Shall grace a peg here in Jerusalem,
While I, barefoot and scantily attired,
Shall with my teachers tread the burning sands
Of distant Ganges.

NATHAN.

That were like yourself.

DERVISH.

Ay, and play chess with them.

NATHAN.

Your greatest bliss.

DERVISH.

Could that have metamorphosed in a trice
The wealthiest beggar to a poor rich man?

NATHAN.

Not that, I trow.

DERVISH.

No—it was something else,
And something even more absurd than that;
I felt me flattered as I ne'er had been,
Flattered by Saladin's kind-hearted whim.

NATHAN.

And what was that?

DERVISH.

A beggar, so he said,
And such alone, could tell how beggars feel;
Only a beggar by experience knew

How to bestow on beggars gracefully.
My predecessor had been much too cold,
Too rough, and gave so rudely when he gave;
He probed each case too harshly, ne'er content
To witness want, but still would know its cause,
And thus proportionate his cautious dole.
'Al Hafi,' so he said, 'will not do that,
And Saladin in him will not appear
So circumspect and so unkindly kind.
He is not like those choked-up conduit-pipes
Which issue forth in foul and fitful jets
The streams which entered them so clear and calm.
Al Hafi thinks, Al Hafi feels as I.'
Thus sweetly trilled the fowler's pipe, until
The fowl was netted—idiot that I am;
Dupe of a dupe!

NATHAN.

Nay, softly, Dervish, now!

DERVISH.

What! were it not the rankest foolery,
By thousands to oppress and crush mankind,
Rob them, destroy them, torture them, yet play
The philanthrope to individual men![1]
Were it not impious folly, too, to ape
The goodness of Almighty God that's shed
Without distinction upon good and bad,
Benignly shed in sunshine and in shower
On field and plain and wilderness alike,

[1]See Note 10.

Yet not possess his never-failing hand.
Were that not foolery?

NATHAN.

Enough—desist.

DERVISH.

Nay, let me dwell on my own folly too.
Were it not folly if I sought to find
The better side of follies such as these,
Only because of such a better side
To share such follies—ha! now, what of that?

NATHAN.

Hie thee, Al Hafi, quick as e'er you can,
Back to your deserts, for 'mid men, I fear,
You shortly may unlearn to be a man.

DERVISH.

You're right—I feared that very thing myself;
Good-bye.

NATHAN.

But why such haste? Al Hafi, wait;
Think you your desert's like to run away?—
Would he but hear me! ho! Al Hafi, ho!—
He's gone! and fain would I have asked of him
About our Templar, for the chances are
He knows the man.

SCENE IV.—DAYA, *in haste to* NATHAN.

DAYA.

Oh, Nathan, Nathan!

NATHAN.

Well,
What would you now?

DAYA.

He has appeared again;
He's there once more!

NATHAN.

Who, Daya, who?

DAYA.

He, he!

NATHAN.

He, he—why, *he's* are plenty; but I trow
Your he's your only he—this should not be,
Not if he were an angel past dispute

DAYA.

Beneath the palms he wanders once again,
And ever and anon he plucks the dates.

NATHAN.

And eats them, sure, as any Templar would.

DAYA.

Oh, Nathan, wherefore will you tease me thus?
Her hungry eye espied him in a trice

Behind the thickly interlacing palms,
And follows him unswervingly. She begs,
Conjures that you will go to him at once;
Oh, hasten—from the casement she will sign
Whether he still walks there, or wends his steps
Farther afield. Oh haste you, Nathan, haste!

NATHAN.

Just as I've lighted from my camel?—nay,
Would that be seemly? better go yourself,
And tell him I've returned. Be well assured
The worthy youth has only shunned my house
Because its lord was absent; and that now
He'll gladly come when Recha's father thus
Invites him here,—go, tell him that I do,
And from my heart.

DAYA.

'Twere vain; he'll never come,
Since, to be brief, he comes to ne'er a Jew.

NATHAN.

Go, ne'ertheless—at least detain him there;
Or, failing that, then hold him in your eye;
Go, go at once—I'll follow you anon.
(NATHAN *enters his house.* DAYA *sets forth.*)

SCENE V.—*An open place shaded by palm trees. The* TEMPLAR *pacing up and down beneath the palms. At a little distance a lay brother of the convent, dogging his steps, and seemingly desirous of addressing him.*

TEMPLAR.

That fellow dogs me not for pastime. See
How greedily he leers upon my hands!
(*To the Friar.*)
Good brother—or good father, possibly——

LAY BROTHER.

Simple lay brother, sir, at your command.

TEMPLAR.

Well, my good brother, had I aught myself—
But, as God lives, I've nothing.

LAY BROTHER.

All the same,
Right hearty thanks; God give you thousand-fold
What you would give; the will and not the gift
Doth constitute the giver; and besides,
I was not sent unto your Excellence
To crave a dole.

TEMPLAR.

So then you *have* been sent?

LAY BROTHER.

Ay—from the cloister——

TEMPLAR.

Where I even now
Hoped to receive a slender pilgrim's meal.

LAY BROTHER.

The tables were already occupied;
But come, I pray you, back with me.

TEMPLAR.

Why so?
'Tis true 'tis long since I have tasted flesh,
But what of that—thank God the dates are ripe.

LAY BROTHER.

Be cautious, sir, I pray you, with that fruit;
Too freely used, 'tis hurtful, for it clogs
The spleen, and genders melancholy blood.

TEMPLAR.

What if I loved the melancholy mood?
But surely, sir, you were not sent to me
To sound this wholesome warning.

LAY BROTHER.

No—I'm sent
To sound *you*—I may say, to feel your pulse.

TEMPLAR.

What! can you say it to my very face?

LAY BROTHER.

And wherefore not?

TEMPLAR (*aside*).

A crafty friar this——

(*To the Friar*).

Boasts then your convent many more like you?

LAY BROTHER.

I know not—but, dear sir, I must obey.

TEMPLAR.

And so you just obey, and split no hairs?

LAY BROTHER.

Were it obedience else, dear sir?

TEMPLAR (*aside*).

See now,
Simplicity is ever in the right.

(*To the Friar*).

Yet I presume you may confide to me.
Who is the man so keen to probe my case;
I'll swear 'tis not yourself.

LAY BROTHER.

Would such a wish
Beseem or profit *me?*

TEMPLAR.

Whom, then, I pray,
Would it beseem or profit, since he is
So curious about me—who's the man?

LAY BROTHER.

The Patriarch, I fancy, for 'twas he
Who sent me after you.

TEMPLAR.

The Patriarch!
Knows he no better what the crimson cross
On the white mantle means?

LAY BROTHER.

Why, *I* know that.

TEMPLAR.

Well, I'm a Templar, and a prisoner,
Taken at Tebnin[1]—if you care to know—
The fortress we so keenly wished to win
In the last moments of the armistice,
That we might then storm Sidon, I may add.
I was the twentieth taken, and alone
Was spared by Saladin. The Patriarch now
Knows all he needs to know of me; nay, more
Than he can need to know.

LAY BROTHER.

But hardly more
Than he already knows. He now would know
Why Saladin was moved to spare your life,
And yours alone.

TEMPLAR.

Do I myself know that?
Bare-necked I kneeled already on my cloak
To meet the fatal stroke, when Saladin
Scanned me more closely, bounded to my side,
And made a signal to his Mamelukes;

[1]See Note 11.

They raised me up and struck my fetters off;
I made as if to thank him, but I saw
His eyes suffused with tears, and there he stood
Mute as myself,—he left the spot,—I lived,—
What means this riddle let the Patriarch
Unriddle for himself.

LAY BROTHER.

He thence concludes
God has reserved you for some weighty ends;
For glorious things.

TEMPLAR.

For glorious things, forsooth!
To snatch a Jewish wench from out the flames;
Escort on Sinai gaping pilgrim bands,
And such-like feats.

LAY BROTHER.

The glories are as yet
To follow, and so far you've not done ill;
Perhaps the Patriach himself designs
Some far more weighty matters for you now.

TEMPLAR.

Ay, brother, think you so? he has, belike,
Already hinted it to you.

LAY BROTHER.

He has; but first
I am to sound you, whether you're the man
Would suit his purpose.

TEMPLAR.

Well then, sound away.
(*Aside.*)
I'd gladly see how the good brother sounds.

LAY BROTHER.

The shortest plan will be to tell you plain
The Patriarch's purpose.

TEMPLAR.

Well?

LAY BROTHER.

He wishes you
To bear a certain letter——

TEMPLAR.

Wishes *me*
To bear a letter! I'm no courier.
Is *this* the weighty end more glorious far
Than rescuing Jewish maids?

LAY BROTHER.

It must be so;
For, says the Patriarch, this letter is
Of passing weight to Christendom entire;
The man who bears it safely, so he says,
God of a surety will reward in heaven
With a peculiar crown, and this, he says,
No man is worthier of than you.

TEMPLAR.

Than I!

LAY BROTHER.

Since, to deserve this special crown, he says,
Scarce any man's more fit than you——

TEMPLAR.

Than I!

LAY BROTHER.

You're free, can reconnoitre here at will,
You understand how towns are to be stormed,
And how defended; you can estimate
Better than any, says the Patriarch,
The strength and weakness of the inner wall,
The second wall, late reared by Saladin,
And to the champions of God, he says,
Describe it all.

TEMPLAR.

Good brother, might I ask
To know the further tenor of the note?

LAY BROTHER.

Well, I can scarcely tell you that myself;
It is intended for King Philip's hands;[1]
It seems the Patriarch—sure I've wondered oft
How such a holy man, whose wont it is
To live for heaven alone, can condescend
At the same time to be so well informed
Of worldly things; it must revolt his soul——

TEMPLAR.

Well then, the Patriarch?

[1]See Note 12.

LAY BROTHER.

Precisely knows
And surely, how and where, and in what strength
And from what quarter, Saladin intends
To open the campaign in case the war
Breaks out afresh.

TEMPLAR.

He does?

LAY BROTHER.

And 'tis his wish
To let King Philip know how matters stand,
That he may proximately weigh the risks,
And judge if it were better to renew
With Saladin, whate'er the cost, the truce
Your Order lately did so boldly break.

TEMPLAR.

Oh, what a Patriarch! Ay, ay, I see
The dear and daring man would make of me
No ordinary courier, but—a spy.
Now, worthy brother, tell your Patriarch
That in so far as you can make me out
This is no job for me—that I am bound
Still to regard myself a prisoner;
And that a Templar's single duty is
To wield the sword with valor in the fray,
Not play the common spy.

LAY BROTHER.

I thought as much;
Nor can I take your answer much amiss.

But now the best's to come; the Patriarch
Has somehow pried out how the fort is named,
And where 'tis situate on Lebanon,
In which the store of treasure is preserved
Wherewith the prudent sire of Saladin
Maintains his forces and defrays the cost
Of all his warfare. Saladin, it seems,
Repairs from time to time, by hidden paths,
With slender escort, to that mountain fort—
You follow me?

TEMPLAR.

Not I!

LAY BROTHER.

The Patriarch thinks
It were an easy matter now to seize
On Saladin, and make an end of him.
What—do you shudder? Oh, a worthy brace
Of godly Maronites are quite prepared,
If but a valiant man would lead them on,
To venture it.

TEMPLAR.

And so your Patriarch
Has chosen me to be that valiant man?

LAY BROTHER.

And then he thinks that out of Ptolemais
King Philip could most fitly lend a hand
To help the work.

TEMPLAR.

What, brother, this to me!
To me!—have you not heard—this moment heard,
The monstrous debt of gratitude I owe
To Saladin?

LAY BROTHER.

Oh, yes, I heard

TEMPLAR.

And yet?

LAY BROTHER.

The Patriarch thinks all this is very well;
But that God's service and your Order's claims—

TEMPLAR.

These alter not the case—these ne'er enjoin
A deed of villainy!

LAY BROTHER.

No—surely not;
Only—so thinks the Patriarch—villainy.
In sight of man's not so in sight of God.

TEMPLAR.

That I should owe my life to Saladin,
And yet take his!

LAY BROTHER.

Ay, but the Patriarch says
Saladin's still the foe of Christendom,

And never possibly can win the right
To be a friend to you.

TEMPLAR.

A friend—well, no—
Yet one to whom I may not prove a knave,
A most ungrateful knave.

LAY BROTHER.

Oh, surely no—
And yet the Patriarch holds a man is quit
Of gratitude before both God and man
Whene'er the service which involved the debt
Hath not been rendered for his sake alone;
And when 'tis known, so thinks the Patriarch,
That Saladin hath only spared your life
Because a something in your face and mien
Recalled his long-lost brother to his mind——

TEMPLAR.

And so the Patriarch knows *this* too,—well,
Ah, were it so in sooth! Ah, Saladin,
If nature formed one feature of my face
In the resemblance of your brother's looks,
Should nought within me correspond thereto?
And what might correspond, could I suppress
To do a pleasure to a Patriarch?
Nature, thou lie'st not thus; nor in His works
Doth God thus contradict Himself—go, brother,
go;
Rouse not my gall—begone, I say, begone!

LAY BROTHER.

I go—and go more happy than I came—
Forgive me, sir, but think, we cloister folk
Must needs obey our Patriarch's commands.

SCENE VI.—*The* TEMPLAR *and* DAYA; *the latter of whom has for some time been watching the former at a distance and now approaches him.*

DAYA (*to herself*).

Yon monk, methinks, left him in no sweet mood,
Yet I must dare my errand.

TEMPLAR.

Ha! what's this?
The adage lies not—monk and woman still,
Woman and monk are the Fiend's fellest claws;
To-day he flings me in the clutch of both.

DAYA.

Is't possible, my noble knight; is't you? Thank God,
A thousand thanks to God,—but where, I pray,
Where have you hidden all this time? I trust
You've not been ill.

TEMPLAR.

Not I.

DAYA.

Then well?

TEMPLAR.

Quite well.

DAYA.

Oh, we've been anxious upon your account!

TEMPLAR.

Have you in sooth?

DAYA.

You've surely been away.

TEMPLAR.

Right.

DAYA.

And came back to-day?

TEMPLAR.

No, yesterday.

DAYA.

Our Recha's father too returned this day;
And now I trust that she may hope——

TEMPLAR.

For what?

DAYA.

For what she oft had bid me ask of you;
Her father too now earnestly entreats
That you will come—he's fresh from Babylon

With twenty camels bearing precious loads
Of gems, and stuffs, and costly spices, such
As Persia, Syria, and far Cathay[1]
Alone can furnish forth.

TEMPLAR.

I purchase nought.

DAYA.

His people honor him like any prince;
And yet I wonder that they call him aye
Nathan the Wise, and not in preference
Nathan the Rich.

TEMPLAR.

Possibly rich and wise
Are all the same to them.

DAYA.

But more than all
They ought to have entitled him the Good;
For oh you cannot think how good he is;
Soon as he learned our Recha's debt to you,
What in that grateful moment would he not
Have done or given to guerdon you!

TEMPLAR.

Indeed.

DAYA.

Try him, sir, come and see.

[1]See Note 13.

TEMPLAR.

But then how soon
Such moments melt away![1]

DAYA.

Think you, sir knight,
Had he not been so kindly and so good,
I e'er had brooked to stay with him so long?
Think you I know not what's a Christian's place?
No, it was never o'er my cradle crooned
That I should find my way to Palestine
With my late husband, for no worthier end
Than there to wait upon a Jewish girl.
My husband, sir, was then a well-born squire
In Kaiser Frederick's host——

TEMPLAR.

By birth a Swiss,
Who had at once the honor and the joy
Of choking in the self-same puny stream
With his Imperial Majesty himself.[2]
Woman, how oft you've told me this before;
Will you then never cease to pester me?

DAYA.

Pester you—oh my God!

TEMPLAR.

Ay, pester me.
I'm now resolved never to see you more,

[1]See Note 14. [2]See Note 15.

Nor hear your prate—nor do I choose to be
Incessantly reminded of a deed
I never meant to do; the thought of which
Is a continual riddle to myself.
I would not wish now to repent of it;
But mark, should such a case occur again,
You'll have yourself to blame if I should act
Not quite so promptly, but consider first
And ponder well, and rather leave what burns
To burn to death.

DAYA.

Now God forbid!

TEMPLAR.

Henceforth
Do me the kindness at the least, I pray,
To cease to know me more; and more than all,
To save me from this father—Jew is Jew,
And I'm a downright Swabian—for the maid,
Her image long ago has left my thoughts,
If e'er it dwelt there.

DAYA.

Ay, but yours still dwells
In hers.

TEMPLAR.

What business has it there?

DAYA.

Who knows?
Folk are not always what they seem to be.

TEMPLAR.

They're seldom any better.

(*He is about to go*).

DAYA.

Oh, sir, wait,

Wherefore such haste?

TEMPLAR.

Woman, make not the palms
Hateful to me, where I'm so fain to roam.

DAYA.

Then go, thou German bear—go—go—and yet
I must not lose the traces of the beast.

(*She follows him at a distance.*)

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*The Sultan's Palace.*

SALADIN *and* SITTAH *playing chess.*

SITTAH.

My Saladin, oh how you play to-day!

SALADIN.

Not well? Methought——

SITTAH.

Ay, well enough for me;
Yet hardly even that—take back that move.

SALADIN.

Why so?

SITTAH.

Because unless you do, your knight
Will be exposed.

SALADIN.

You're right—well, thus.

SITTAH.

But now
My pawn will fork.[1]

[1]See Note 16.

SALADIN.

Ah, right again—then check!

SITTAH.

But that won't help you. I advance, and now
You're as you were.

SALADIN.

From this dilemma, sure,
There's no escaping with impunity;
Well, take my knight.

SITTAH.

I will not take him now;
I'll pass him by.

SALADIN.

Small thanks to you—that move
Is more important to you than the knight.

SITTAH.

Perhaps.

SALADIN.

But reckon not without your host;
For see, I'd wager you did not expect
This move of mine.

SITTAH.

No—how could I suppose
That you were weary of your queen.

SALADIN.

My queen?

SITTAH.

Ay, now 'tis plain that I this day shall win
My thousand dinars,[1] if I win no more.

SALADIN.

How so?

SITTAH.

How can you ask, since purposely
You lose with all your might—and yet I gain
But little by it, for besides the fact
That play like this has little pleasure in't,
E'en when I lose I ever gain the most,
Since, to console me for my want of skill,
You ever give me double what I've lost.

SALADIN.

But look you, little sister, when you lose,
Perhaps you do it purposely as well.

SITTAH.

Well, well, your generosity at least
Perhaps may be the reason, brother mine,
That I've not learned to play a better hand.

SALADIN.

But we neglect our game; come, finish it.

SITTAH.

Is that so,—well then, check, and double check!

SALADIN.

I never thought of this discovered check,[2]

[1]See Note 17. [2]See Note 16.

By which I fear I'm like to lose my queen,
And game as well.

SITTAH.

But could you help yourself?
Let's see.

SALADIN.

No, sister, you may take the queen;
She never was a lucky piece to me.

SITTAH.

Only at chess?

SALADIN.

Take her—it matters not,
Now all my other pieces are secure.

SITTAH.

Nay, nay, you've taught me better, Saladin,
The courtesy that's ever due to queens.[1]

SALADIN.

Take her or leave her, even as you will,
But she is mine no more.

SITTAH.

But where's the need?
Here's check to you again—check, check!

SALADIN.

Go on!

[1]See Note 18.

SITTAH.

Ay, check, and no mistake!

SALADIN.

And checkmate too.

SITTAH.

Not quite; you still can interpose your knight,
And try again—yet do whate'er you please,
I fear 'tis all the same.

SALADIN.

Ay, ay, you've won,
And Hafi now must pay—send for him quick.
Sittah, you were not altogether wrong,
I played too absently; I was distraught.
Why must they ever give us this plain set
Of formless pieces, representing nought,
And barren of suggestion to the mind?
Or did they fancy that I meant to play
With the Imaum?[1]—perhaps—but losers still
Must ever seek excuses; and I fear
'Twas not the formless pieces made me lose;
But your superior skill, your quicker eye,
And greater concentration won the day.

SITTAH.

Thus would you dull the sting of your defeat?
Enough, you were distraught, and more than I.

[1]See Note 19.

SALADIN.

Than you, forsooth!—what should make *you* distraught?

SITTAH.

Not cares like yours, I own. But, Saladin,
When shall we play as keenly as we used?

SALADIN.

Nay, let us play more keenly than before;
Or think you that the war will hinder it?
No, let it burst as quickly as it may;
It is not I renewed it. Willingly
Had I prolonged the armistice afresh;
And at the same time willingly had won
The man who's fit to be my Sittah's mate,
And that is Richard's brother[1]—none but he—
My Richard's brother!

SITTAH.

You are ever fain
To praise your Richard.

SITTAH.

Had his sister now
Chanced to become our brother Melek's bride,[2]
Oh what a house the union would have formed!
Best of the best, and first of all the earth.
Mark me, I'm nothing loath to vaunt my race;
I'm worthy of my friends. A stock like that
Had yielded sons who had been men indeed!

[1]See Note 20. [2]See Note 21.

SITTAH.

Did I not ever flout the specious dream?
You know not, *will not* know, what Christians are;
Their pride is to be Christians, never men;
Ay, even that which since their Founder's time
Hath tinged their superstition with a touch
Of pure humanity, is prized by them
Never because 'tis human, but because
'Twas preached and practised by their Jesus Christ.
'Tis well for them he was so rare a man;
Well that they take his virtues upon trust;
But what to them the virtues of their Christ?
'Tis was not his virtues, but his name alone
They seek to spread, that it may dominate
And cloud the names of other noble men;
Ay, 'tis the name, the name of Christ alone
Your Christian cares about.

SALADIN.

By this you mean
They would insist that you and Melek both
Should bear the name before ye could presume
As man or wife to love a Christian?

SITTAH.

Just so—as if a Christian alone
Can know the love which the Creator's hand
Hath planted in the breast of man and wife!

SALADIN.

The Christians hold such strange absurdities
They well might credit this. And yet you err;
For 'tis the Templars, not the Christians,
As Templars, mark me, not as Christians,
Who foil my purpose here, refusing still
To part with Acre from their greedy clutch;
Acre, which Richard's sister should have brought
As dowry to our Melek; while, to mask
Their knightly aims, they needs must play the monk,
The guileless monk, forsooth!—and now, to snatch
A fleeting triumph, they will scarce await
The termination of the armistice.
So be it sirs, 'tis all the same to me,
Were all else only as it ought to be.

SITTAH.

Brother, what else goes wrong with you; what else
Could disconcert you thus?

SALADIN.

What else but that
Which still hath disconcerted all my schemes;
I've been to Lebanon and seen your sire;[1]
He sinks beneath his cares.

SITTAH.

Alas, alas!

[1]See Note 22.

SALADIN.

He must succumb with straits on every hand;
All fails, now here, now there——

SITTAH.

What straits—what fails?

SALADIN.

What else but what I almost scorn to name;
Which, when 'tis mine, seems so superfluous,
And, when it lacks, so indispensable.
Where is Al Hafi now, hath no one gone
To call him here? Oh hateful, cursed gold!—
Ha! here he comes, and in the nick of time.

SCENE II.—AL HAFI, SALADIN *and* SITTAH.

AL HAFI.

I trust the Egyptian moneys have arrived,
And in good store.

SALADIN.

What, have you word of them?

AL HAFI.

Not I; but yet I thought they must have come,
And that belike you now had sent for me
To take them over.

SALADIN.

Well, in any case,
You'll pay a thousand dinars unto Sittah.

AL HAFI.

What! pay instead of get; well, that is good;
Why, this is something worse than getting nought.
To Sittah, too,—why that? what, lost again?
Once more a loser at your chess? ay, ay,
There lies the board.

SITTAH.

Perhaps you grudge my luck.

AL HAFI (*examining the chess-board; while* SALADIN *paces up and down, plunged in thought*).

Grudge you, forsooth! when, sure, you know full well——

SITTAH (*with earnest signs to him*).

Hush, Hafi, hush!

AL HAFI.

You grudge it to yourself![1]

SITTAH.

Oh, Hafi, silence!

AL HAFI.

Were the white men yours?
And you gave check?

[1]See Note 23.

SITTAH (*aside*).

Thank goodness, Saladin
Hath not perceived his drift.

AL HAFI.

Is it his move?

SITTAH (*in his ear*).

Oh, Hafi, tell him I shall get the gold.

AL HAFI (*still intent upon the board*).

Oh yes, you'll get it as you always do.

SITTAH.

How! are you mad?

AL HAFI.

The game's not over yet;
Why, Saladin, you've still a chance to win.

SALADIN (*with abrupt indifference*).

No matter, pay the money to her.

AL HAFI.

Pay!
Why, there's your queen!

SALADIN (*testily*)

Ay, but she doesn't count;
She's lost.

SITTAH (*aside to* AL HAFI).

Oh, Hafi, make believe at least,
And say that I may send to fetch the gold.

AL HAFI (*absorbed in contemplation of the board*).

Just so, as formerly.—But though the queen
May count no longer, yet in spite of that
Saladin is not mate.

SALADIN (*stepping forward and dashing down the chess-board*).

Oh yes, I am,
And choose to be so.

AL HAFI.

Well, then, please yourself;
Your play is like your payment of the stakes,
Both sham alike.

SALADIN (*to* SITTAH).

What's this he mutters now?

SITTAH (*while she makes signs to* AL HAFI).

You know him surely, prone to bristle up,
Exacting, nay, a trifle jealous too.

SALADIN.

Jealous of you! my sister! sure not that;
Hafi, what's this,—you jealous?

AL HAFI.

Well, perhaps
It may be so. I'd gladly have her brain,
And gladly have her heart as well.

SITTAH.

Howbeit,
As yet he's ever paid my claims in full;

And will do so to-day, misdoubt him not;
Now go, Al Hafi, go; I fain would send
To fetch the gold.

AL HAFI.

No; I'll no longer play
A farce like this; he's sure to find it out
Sooner or later.

SALADIN.

Find out what, and whom?

SITTAH.

Was this your promise, Hafi? is it thus
You keep your word?

AL HAFI.

Well, well, but could I guess
The jest would go so far?

SALADIN.

Come, out with it!

SITTAH.

Al Hafi, I implore you be discreet.

SALADIN.

Nay, this is something strange; what can it be
Sittah so vehemently deprecates,
So passionately of a stranger begs;
Ay, of a Dervish, rather than of me
Her brother?—Hafi, I command you now
To tell me what it is—speak, Dervish, speak!

AL HAFI.

Not only has she ta'en
Nothing from me——

SALADIN.

The noble girl has made
Advances in addition!—is it so?

AL HAFI.

Ay, she's maintained the cost of all your court;
Unaided paid your whole expenditure.

SALADIN (*embracing* SITTAH).

Ah that indeed is like you, sister mine!

SITTAH.

Who but my brother made me rich enough
To do so?

AL HAFI.

Ay, and soon he'll make of her
A pauper like himself.

SALADIN.

A pauper—I!
When had I ever more or less than now?
A robe, a sword, a charger, and a God;
What need I more? and these I ne'er can lack.
And yet, Al Hafi, I could scold you too.

SITTAH.

Oh, brother, scold him not—I would to God
That I could thus allay our father's cares.

SITTAH.

My brother, suffer not a little thing
To move you more than it is meet it should.
You know right well I have full many a time
Won just as much as this from you at chess;
But since just now I do not need the gold,
And since just now the gold in Hafi's chest
Is none too plentiful, I've let it stand
Unpaid as yet; but be you well assured
I am not minded, brother, to bestow
My gains on you, or Hafi, or his chest.

AL HAFI.

Were this but all!

SITTAH.

Well, sundry other sums
I've left as a deposit in his hands.
The stipend, too, which you assigned to me
For some few months hath lain with him on trust.

AL HAFI.

E'en that's not all.

SALADIN.

Not all?—then tell me all.

AL HAFI.

Whilst we've awaited these Egyptian sums—

SITTAH (*to* SALADIN).

Why hear his talk?

SALADIN.

Ah, now you dash my happiness again.
Nothing is lacking, or *can* lack, to me;
But he lacks all, and we all share his lack.
What shall I do?—belike it will be long
Ere Egypt sends the gold,—why this should be
God only knows, for all is peaceful there.—
I can retrench, reduce, economise,
And gladly, when it touches me alone,
And not my friends—but what can that avail?
A horse, a cloak, a sword, I still must have;
And nought can be abated from my God;
He is content with such a little thing;
My heart alone—Hafi, I counted much
Upon your surplus.

AL HAFI.

Surplus!—say yourself
If you would not have had me soon impaled,
Or strangled at the least, had I been caught
With surpluses—downright embezzlement[1]
Had been a safer thing to venture on.

SALADIN.

Well, what must now be done? Say, could you not
Have borrowed first of all from some one else
Than Sittah?

SITTAH.

Brother, think you I'd be robbed

[1]See Note 24.

Of such a privilege—and that by him?
I still would claim it—I am not as yet
Entirely stranded.

SALADIN.

Not entirely yet!
That still was wanting to complete the wrong.
Haste you, Al Hafi, go forthwith—contrive;
Collect from whom you can and how you can;
Go, borrow, promise; only borrow not
From those whom I've enriched; to ask from them
Might look like reclamation of my gifts.
Go to the greediest, such are ever sure
Most readily to lend, since well they know
How well their moneys fatten in my hands.

AL HAFI.

I know none such.

SITTAH.

It just occurs to me
I've somehow heard, Al Hafi, that your friend
Has now returned.

AL HAFI (*with surprise*).

My friend, say you, my friend?
And who might that be?

SITTAH.

Your belauded Jew.

AL HAFI.

A Jew—belauded—and by me?

SITTAH.

The man—
How well I recollect your very words—
The man to whom his God had richly given
At once the greatest of all earthly gifts
And the most worthless.

AL HAFI.

Said I so?—by that
I wonder what I could have meant.

SITTAH.

You meant
That wisdom was the greatest gift of God,
Riches the smallest.

AL HAFI.

What! this of a Jew!
When could I e'er have said so of a Jew?

SITTAH.

You said it of your Nathan—sure you did.

AL HAFI.

Of Nathan? well, of *him* perhaps I did;
I did not think of him. But is it true
That he is once more home again at last?
If so, you may be sure he's prospered well;

Ay, ay, his folk have dubbed him long the Wise,
The Rich as well.

SITTAH.

They call him now the Rich
More than they ever did; the city rings
With tidings of the rich and costly wares
He now has brought.

AL HAFI.

If he's once more the Rich,
Then of a truth he'll be once more the Wise.

SITTAH.

What think you, Hafi, why not go to *him*?

AL HAFI.

For what?—to borrow?—ah, you little know
What Nathan is—*he* lend!—his wisdom lies
Just in the fact that he will lend to none.

SITTAH.

Yet, Hafi, formerly you drew of him
A very different picture.

AL HAFI.

Well, at need
He'll lend you wares—but gold—oh never that;
Oh no, not gold. And yet in other points,
He is a Jew unlike all other Jews;

Has common sense, knows life, plays well at chess;
Yet he excels in bad as well as good
All other Jews besides—count not on him.
He gives unto the poor, 'tis true, and gives
As much perhaps as Saladin himself,
Or if not quite as much, as willingly;
Without distinction, too, since Frank and Jew,
Parsee and Mussulman, are all alike
To Nathan.

SITTAH.

Say you so?

SALADIN.

How comes it then
That I've ne'er heard before of such a man?

SITTAH.

Would he refuse to lend to Saladin?
To Saladin who asks for others' needs,
And never for his own.

AL HAFI.

Ay, here again
You see the Jew, the common sordid Jew.
Trust me, where generosity comes in
He's downright jealous of all other men,
As if he fain would draw unto himself
Each *God reward you* that's exclaimed on earth;
And for this very cause he lends to none

That he may ever have the means to give.
Since charity's commanded by his law,
Not mere complaisance, charity itself
Makes him the most ungracious churl on earth.
'Tis true that he and I for some time back
Have been a trifle strange, but never think
That I for this would do him any wrong;
He's good for all things else, but not for this,
Not for a lender. Now I'll go at once
And knock at other doors—ay, sure enough,
I now bethink me of a certain Moor
Who's rich and greedy too. I'll go to him.

SITTAH.

But, Hafi, why such haste?

SALADIN.

E'en let him go.

Scene III.—Saladin *and* Sittah.

SITTAH.

He hastes away as if his only wish
Were to escape. I wonder what he means;
Think you he honestly decried the Jew,
Or that he only seeks to put us off?

SALADIN.

Why ask me this? I hardly know as yet
Of whom you talked—until this very day

I never heard the name of this your Jew,
Your Nathan.

SITTAH.

Is it possible a man
Should be unknown to you, of whom 'tis said
He hath ransacked the tombs of Solomon
And David too; and by a word of might,
A secret spell, hath power to burst their seals;
From thence he brings to light, from time to time,
The boundless stores of riches which bespeak
No lesser source than these.

SALADIN.

Nay, if the man
Hath dug his boundless riches out of tombs,
Be sure it was not out of Solomon's
Or David's either,—they but hold the bones
Of fools——

SITTAH.

Or miscreants, perhaps—and yet,
Whate'er the source, 'tis more productive far,
More inexhaustible, than Mammon's cave.

SALADIN.

Ay, for he is a trader, as I heard.

SITTAH.

His dromedaries fare on every track
And plod each desert's sands; his barks are moored

In every haven—this Al Hafi's self
Hath often told me; adding with delight
How grandly and how nobly this his friend
Employs the wealth he doth not scorn to win
With such sagacity and diligence;
How free his soul from every prejudice;
To virtue how accessible his heart,
And how in harmony with all that's fair.

SALADIN.

And yet he spoke so doubtfully but now,
So coldly of him.

SITTAH.

No, not coldly, yet
He seemed in doubt, as if he ventured not
To praise him overmuch, yet had no mind
To blame him overmuch without a cause.
Can it be possible that e'en the best
Of all his race is powerless to shun
The foibles of his race; and that, for this,
Al Hafi truly had to blush for him?
Howe'er it be, whether he's more than Jew
Or less, he's rich; and that's enough for us.

SALADIN.

But, sister, sure you would not take his wealth
By downright force?

SITTAH.

What mean you, then, by force?
By fire and sword, belike? Oh no, not that.

What force, forsooth, is needful with the weak
Save their own weakness? But now come with me
To my own private chamber; there you'll hear
A songstress whom I purchased yesterday;
Meanwhile a scheme may ripen in my brain
I've planned for working on this Nathan—come.

SCENE IV.—*In front of* NATHAN'S *house, adjoining the grove of palm trees.* NATHAN *and* RECHA *issuing from the house.* DAYA, *later, meeting them.*

RECHA.

Oh father, you have tarried long—I fear
That you'll no longer find him there.

NATHAN.

Well, well,
If he's no longer there beneath the palms,
We'll find him somewhere else—be calm,—see there,
Is that not Daya coming to us?

RECHA.

Ay,
I fear she must have lost him quite.

NATHAN.

Oh, no,
Not quite.

RECHA.

If not, she would not come so slow.

NATHAN.

She has not seen us yet.

RECHA.

But now she does.

NATHAN.

And doubles now her speed—see, see—be calm;
I pray you to be calm.

RECHA.

What! would you wish
To have a daughter capable of calm
In such a case—regardless of the lot
Of him who saved a life that's dear to her
Only because she owed it first to you?

NATHAN.

I would not have you other than you are,
E'en if I knew that now your soul was stirred
By feelings of another kind.

RECHA.

What kind?
What mean you, father?

NATHAN.

Need you ask of me?
So coyly too—so timidly of me?
Whatever may be passing in your breast
Is Nature's blameless working—never fear
E'en as I fear not—only promise me,
If e'er your heart should speak in plainer tones,
You will not hide from me the lightest wish
That it may form.

RECHA.

I tremble at the thought
That e'er my heart could shroud itself from you.

NATHAN.

No more of this—'tis settled once for all——
But here comes Daya—well, what news of him?

DAYA.

He still is pacing underneath the palms,
And soon he'll pass beside yon wall—see there,
He's coming now.

RECHA.

He seems irresolute
Whether to go straight on or back again;
To right or left.

DAYA.

No, no, he sometimes goes
Round by the cloister—seldom, it is true,

But if he does, he then must pass this way;
What will you wager on't?

RECHA.

You're right, you're right!
But did you speak with him, and what's his mood?

DAYA.

Just as it ever is.

NATHAN.

Then have a care
Lest he perceive you—step a little back;
Or, better still, return, and go within.

RECHA.

Oh for another look—plague on that copse
Which robs me of him now!

DAYA.

Come, come,
Your father's right; if he should see you here,
The chances are he'll disappear at once.

RECHA.

That odious, odious copse!

NATHAN.

If suddenly
He should emerge from it, he cannot fail
To see you where you stand, so go at once;
I pray you to be gone.

DAYA.

Come, come, I know
A lattice whence we'll see them.

RECHA.

Be it so.
(RECHA *and* DAYA *return to the house.*)

SCENE V.—NATHAN, *and presently the* TEMPLAR.

NATHAN.

I almost shrink from this eccentric boy;
His rugged virtues well-nigh make me start.
Strange that one man should have the subtle power
To move and agitate another thus!
Ha! here he comes—by Heaven, he is indeed
A manly youngster—ay, I like him well,
His bold defiant look, his jaunty step;
What though the shell be rough, the kernel, sure,
Will not be that—I've somewhere seen his like.
(*To the* TEMPLAR.)
Forgive me, noble Frank.

TEMPLAR.

For what?

NATHAN.

I pray——

TEMPLAR.

What, Jew?

NATHAN.

For license to accost you, sir.

TEMPLAR.

Can I prevent it—well, at least be brief.

NATHAN.

Oh stay; oh hasten not so proudly on;
Oh pass not with such lofty scorn a man
Whom you have made your debtor evermore!

TEMPLAR.

How so?—Ah, now I guess—belike you are——

NATHAN.

Nathan's my name—I'm father of the maid
Your reckless courage rescued from the flames;
I come to——

TEMPLAR.

If to thank me, pray forbear;
I've had to bear too great a load of thanks
Already for this trifle—and besides
You owe me nothing. Think you that I knew
The maid you speak of was a child of yours?
A Templar's duty is to render help
To every fellow-creature in distress.
Moreover, when I did the deed, my life

Was but a burden to me, and I seized
I gladly seized, the opportunity
To risk it for another, even though
'Twere but a Jewish girl.

NATHAN.

'Tis grandly said;
Grand, yet forbidding!—still, I comprehend
The turn you give it—modest heroism
Takes refuge oft behind forbidding forms
To shun our admiration. If you spurn
The tribute of my thanks, what other meed
Would you scorn less?—Sir knight, if you were not
A stranger and a captive in our midst,
I would not speak so boldly—yet command
In what I now can serve you.

TEMPLAR.

You?—in nought.

NATHAN.

I'm rich.

TEMPLAR.

The richer Jew to me was ne'er
The better Jew.

NATHAN.

Yet haply could you not,
In spite of that, bethink you of a use
For what of good he has?—I mean his wealth.

TEMPLAR.

Well, were it only for my mantle's sake
I will not quite decline your proffered help;
As soon as it is wholly gone to rags,
When neither stitch nor patch shall serve its turn,
I'll come and borrow of you stuff or cash
To make another—nay, look not at once
So black about it—for the nonce you're safe;
The matter has not come to that as yet;
You see 'tis still in tolerable case;
Only this corner of it, as you see,
Displays an ugly mark, for it was singed;
And that befell it as I bore your girl
From out the flames.

NATHAN (*taking in his hand the singed corner of the* TEMPLAR'S *mantle, and contemplating it*).

Alack, 'tis passing strange
That this grim spot, this brand-mark of the fire,
Should speak a better witness for the man.
Than his own lips!—I fain would kiss it, sir,
This spot. Ah, pardon me—I meant it not.
(*A tear falls from his eye on the knight's mantle*).

TEMPLAR.

What meant you not?

NATHAN.

To shed this tear on it.

TEMPLAR.

It matters not—'tis but a drop the more.
(*Aside*).
Methinks this Jew begins to puzzle me.

NATHAN.

Permit me for a moment, sir, to take
Your mantle to my daughter.

TEMPLAR.

Wherefore that?

NATHAN.

That she may press her lips upon this spot,
Since now it is in vain for her to hope
To clasp your knees.

TEMPLAR.

Jew, Jew!—or if your name
Be Nathan, well then, Nathan, I protest
You fit your words with wondrous force and point;
I know not what to say. Perhaps, perhaps——

NATHAN.

Feign and disguise your motives as you will,
I see you through—you were too generous,
Too good, to be more courtly than you were;
A melting maiden, an ambassadress
Too pressing, and a father far away;

Ay, you were careful of her fair good name;
You shunned to try her—fled from victory—
For this, too, I would thank you.

TEMPLAR.

Well, I own
You know at least how Templars ought to feel.

NATHAN.

What!—Templars only—ay, and only ought
Because their Order's rules prescribe it so?
I know how good men think, and well I know
That good men are produced in every land.

TEMPLAR.

Yet with a difference, I hope?

NATHAN.

Just so,
A difference of color, form, and dress.

TEMPLAR.

And number, too, perhaps, in various lands?

NATHAN.

Such small distinctions are of little weight;
The great man everywhere needs elbow-room.
Too many, planted in too straight a space,
Resemble trees which bruise each other's boughs;
The middling good, like us, are found in crowds;
But each must dwell in charity with all;

The knot must not look down upon the gnarl;[1]
Nor let the topmost twig presume to think
That it alone sprang not from mother earth.

TEMPLAR.

'Tis said right well—yet you must know the folk
Which slandered first of all their fellow-men;
Know you not, Nathan, who the people are
Who first pronounced themselves "The Chosen Race"?
How if I hated not that race indeed,
And yet could not refrain from scorning them
For arrogance like this, bequeathed by them
To Christian and to Mussulman alike,
Who too must boast *their* God alone as true,
You start to hear a Templar speak like this;
A Christian and a Templar; but I ask
When, ay and where, has this fond dream of theirs
That they alone possess the one true God;
This pious rage to force on all the world
This better God of theirs as best of all;
Where has it shown itself in blacker form
Than here, and now[2]—since here and now the scales
Still blind their eyes? However, let it be;
Let him be blind who will. Forget my words,
And let me go!

[1]See Note 25. [2]See Note 26.

NATHAN.

Good youth, you do not know
How much more close I now must cling to you;
We must be friends, we must,—despise my race
As much as e'er you please—we did not choose
Our races for ourselves. Do you and I
Make up our races?—what is race forsooth?—
Are Jews and Christians Christians and Jews
Rather than *men?*—oh, if I've found in you
One more for whom it is enough to be
A *MAN!*

TEMPLAR.

Ay, Nathan, that you have, by Heaven;
You have indeed!—your hand!—I blush to think
That for a moment I misjudged you thus.

NATHAN.

And I am proud of it—for common souls
Are seldom thus misjudged.

TEMPLAR.

Uncommon ones
Can hardly be forgot. Ay, Nathan, ay,
We *must* be friends.

NATHAN.

We are already that.
Oh, how my Recha will be gladdened now,
And what a bright perspective opens up
Before my eyes! Oh, if you knew her, sir!

TEMPLAR.

I burn to do so. But see there—who's this
Bursts from your house? It is your Daya, sure.

NATHAN.

'Tis she—and agitated too!

TEMPLAR.

God grant
That nought has happened to our Recha now.

SCENE VI.—DAYA *in haste to the Preceding.*

DAYA.

Oh Nathan, Nathan!

NATHAN.

Well, what scares you thus?

DAYA.

Oh pardon me, my noble knight, if now
I interrupt you.

NATHAN.

What's the matter? Speak.

DAYA.

The Sultan sends for you—the Sultan seeks
To speak with you—the Sultan—oh my God!

NATHAN.

With me!—the Sultan!—possibly he wants
To view the wares I've brought; he must be told
That few or none have been unpacked as yet.

DAYA.

No, no—he would view nought; he only wants
To speak with you, as soon as e'er you can.

NATHAN.

Well then, I'll go to him—and go you home.

DAYA.

Worshipful knight, excuse us, I entreat;
My God! we are so anxious as to what
The Sultan wants!

NATHAN.

We'll know it soon enough.
(DAYA *goes*).

SCENE VII.—NATHAN *and the* TEMPLAR.

TEMPLAR.

And so you know him not as yet; I mean
In person.

NATHAN.

Who?—the Sultan—no, not yet.
I have not shunned him; neither have I sought

To see him; for the universal voice
Spoke things of him I gladly took on trust;
And even if he equals not his fame,
Yet, by the sparing of your life——

TEMPLAR.

Ay, true,
I never can forget the life I live
Is but a gift from him.

NATHAN.

Through which he gave
A double, nay a treble life to me.
This alters all between us—this alone
Has bound me to his service with a cord
I ne'er can snap. I'm all anxiety
To know his wishes. I'm prepared for all;
Ay, I am e'en prepared to own to him
'Tis for your sake that I am thus prepared.

TEMPLAR.

And I myself have never had a chance
To thank him, often as I've crossed his path.
'Twould seem the impression that I made on him
Has died away as quickly as it rose.
Belike he now remembers me no more;
And yet he must one day remember me,
If it be only to decide my fate.
'Tis not sufficient that at his command,
And at his pleasure, I am living still;

I've yet to learn according to whose will
I must in future shape the life he gave.

NATHAN.

Just so—then let me hasten to him now.
Who knows—perhaps he may let fall a word
That may permit me to allude to you.
Pardon my haste—I may not tarry more.
When will you come to us?

TEMPLAR.

Whene'er I may.

NATHAN.

And that's whene'er you will.

TEMPLAR.

Well then, to-day.

NATHAN.

And, if I may presume to ask, your name?

TEMPLAR.

It was—well—it is Curd von Stauffen—Curd——

NATHAN.

Von Stauffen?—Stauffen?—Stauffen?

TEMPLAR.

Why does this
Surprise you so?

NATHAN.

Von Stauffen? I presume
That many bear the name.

TEMPLAR.

Oh yes—or did;
Here rot the bones of many of the race;
My uncle's self—or father, I should say——
But wherefore do you ever scan me thus,
More and more keenly?

NATHAN.

Oh, 'tis nothing—nought.
Can I e'er weary of beholding you?

TEMPLAR.

Then I will leave you now—the gazer's eye
Full oft sees more than e'er it thought to see;
Trust it not, Nathan; no, leave it to time,
Not curiosity, to make us known. (*He goes.*)

NATHAN (*looking after him with astonishment*).

'The gazer's eye,' he said, 'full oft sees more
Than e'er it thought to see.' It seems as if
He read my soul—and yet it well might be—
Wolf's stature, and his step, his very voice.
'Twas thus Wolf ever used to toss his head;
Just so Wolf bore his sword across his arm;
Just so he held his hand to shade his eyes,
As if to veil the lightning of his glance.
How these deep-graven memories at times
Appear to slumber in our minds until

A word, a tone, awakes them! Can it be?
Von Stauffen!—ay, Filneck and Stauffen—right!
Soon will I look more closely into this.
Meanwhile, to Saladin. But, by my word,
Daya's been listening! Ho, Daya, here!

SCENE VIII.—NATHAN *and* DAYA.

NATHAN.

I'll wager now the hearts of both of you
Are burning to discover something else
Than what the Sultan has to say to me.

DAYA.

And can you blame her? You had just begun
To parley with him on more friendly terms
When Saladin's unlucky summons came
And scared us from the casement.

NATHAN.

Tell her, then,
That she at any moment may expect
A visit from him.

DAYA.

Positively so?

NATHAN.

Daya, I think I may rely on you.
Be on your guard, I pray; you shall not rue't,

Even your Christian scruples may be stilled
By what may follow. Do not mar my plans.
Whate'er you say to her, whate'er you ask,
Be prudent and reserved.

DAYA.

I scarcely need
Advice like this. I go; and go yourself;
For see, I do believe the Sultan sends
A second messenger to fetch you now;
Your Dervish, your Al Hafi, comes this way.

SCENE IX.—NATHAN *and* AL HAFI.

AL HAFI.

Ha! I was making for you even now.

NATHAN.

Is it so pressing then, what can he wish
Of me?

AL HAFI.

Who?

NATHAN.

Saladin—I'm going now.

AL HAFI.

To whom? to Saladin?

NATHAN.

Is it not he
Who sent you?

AL HAFI.

What? Sent *me*—oh, not at all.
So it appears that he *has* sent for you.

NATHAN.

Ay, that he has.

AL HAFI.

Well then, the mischief's done!

NATHAN.

What mischief, Hafi?

AL HAFI.

'Tis no fault of mine;
God knows it's not. What is there I've not said,
What lies not told of you, to stave it off!

NATHAN.

To stave off what? What mischief do you mean?

AL HAFI.

That now you must become his Treasurer.
I pity you, and will not stay to see 't;
I'll go this very hour—you well know where,
And know the way, too. Is there anything
That I can do for you where I am bound?
I'm at your service, only charge me not

With more than such a naked wretch as I
Can take along with me. I'm off at once;
Say quickly what's your will.

NATHAN.

Al Hafi, think;
Remember I'm completely in the dark;
What means this chatter?

AL HAFI.

I suppose you'll take
Your money bags with you.

NATHAN.

My money bags?

AL HAFI.

The gold you'll have to lend to Saladin.

NATHAN.

Is *that* the worst?

AL HAFI.

Should I look calmly on
While he from day to day shall scoop your chests,
And pluck you clean and bare from top to toe?
Should I look on while his extravagance
From prudent bounty's else unfailing stores
Shall borrow, borrow, borrow, till the mice,
The very mice, poor things, that dwell therein
Shall die of hunger? Do you haply think

That he who wants your gold's a likely man
To follow your advice?—*he* take advice!
When did our Saladin e'er take advice?
What think you, Nathan, I beheld him **do**
This very day?

NATHAN.

What, then?

AL HAFI.

I went to him
Just as he happened to be playing chess
With Sittah. Now, she plays a fairish hand;
Saladin thought that he had lost the game;
In fact he had already thrown it up.
The board was there—I gave it but a look,
And found the game was far from being lost——

NATHAN.

Ay, I'll be bound, a precious find for you!

AL HAFI.

He needed only to advance his king
Beside his pawn, to counteract her check—
Could I but show you now.

NATHAN.

I doubt it not.

AL HAFI.

And then the rook had held the field, and she
Had lost the game—so I explained the case;
And said to him—reflect!

NATHAN.

And he, belike,
Would not agree with you.

AL HAFI.

Agree, forsooth!
He would not even hear me; but in fume
Dashed down the chess-board!

NATHAN.

Is it possible?

AL HAFI.

And absolutely said he *chose* to lose!
Chose!—do you call that chess?

NATHAN.

Well, hardly so;
'Tis playing with the game.

AL HAFI.

And yet the stake
Was no mere nut-shell.

NATHAN.

Plague upon the stake;
That was the least of it—but to be deaf
To *your* advice—to shut his ears to you
On such a grave and weighty point as that;
Not to appreciate your eagle glance;
That cries aloud for vengeance—does it not?

AL HAFI.

Tut! can't you see I only told the tale
That you might judge the sort of head he has.
In short, I can no longer bear with him;
Here I've been hunting up these greasy Moors,
To see if any will advance him gold.
I, who ne'er played the beggar for myself,
Must borrow now for him! Your borrowing
Is little better than your begging; while
To lend, at least to lend on usury,
Is little better than it is to steal.
Among my patrons on the Ganges' banks
I need do neither;[1] no, nor be a tool
For either purpose. Ay, on Ganges' banks,
By Ganges only, are there real men;
And you're the only one of all those here
Who fits to dwell there. Come along with me;
Leave in the lurch at once your gold and him;
The glittering dross is all he wants of you;
He's sure to wring it from you in the end;
So, better make an end of it at once;
And I'll provide you with a pilgrim's frock.[2]
Come, come!

NATHAN.

Nay, Hafi, it appears to me
We can at any time fall back on this.
Meanwhile, have patience while I think it o'er.

[1]See Note 27. [2]See Note 28.

AL HAFI.

What! think it o'er indeed! a thing like this
Requires no thinking o'er.

NATHAN.

Well, wait at least
Till I've returned from seeing Saladin,
And said good-bye.

AL HAFI.

The man who hesitates
Seeks only for excuses not to act;
And he who cannot instantly resolve
To live unto himself, remains for aye
The slave of others. Be it as you please.
Good-bye, my way is here, and yours is there.

NATHAN.

But, Hafi, I presume before you go
You'll have to square your treasury accounts.

AL HAFI.

Accounts, indeed! the balance in my chest
Is not worth counting; as for the accounts,
Sittah or you will surely vouch for them.
Good-bye. (*He goes.*)

NATHAN (*looking after him*).

I will, you rough but noble soul.
What shall I say?—your genuine beggar is,
When all is told, your only genuine king.
(*He goes in another direction.*)

ACT III.

SCENE I.—NATHAN'S *house*.

RECHA *and* DAYA.

RECHA.

Daya, what was it that my father said;
That any moment I might look for him?
That sounds as if he would appear at once;
And yet how many have elapsed in vain!
But wherefore think upon the moments passed?
Let me live only for each coming one;
The one that brings him here must come at last.

DAYA.

Plague on the summons to the Sultan's court!
Nathan assuredly had but for this
Brought him at once.

RECHA.

And when the moment comes,
And when my warmest, my most heart-felt wish
Shall be fulfilled at last—what then?

DAYA.

What then?

Why, then I hope *my* warmest wish at last
Shall be fulfilled as well.

RECHA.

But, oh, my wish!
When 'tis accomplished, what shall take its place,
Or what succeed it in this wayward heart
Which now hath lost the very power to beat
Without some dominating wish?—a void?
I tremble at the thought!

DAYA.

Nay, mine shall then
Take up the place of yours—my yearning wish
That you should dwell in Europe, and with those
Who may be worthy of you.

RECHA.

Nay, you err;
The very thing that makes you hug that wish
Prevents it from becoming ever mine.
Your native land attracts you to its shores,
And think you mine should have no charms for me?
Or can the image of your far-off friends
Still lingering faintly in your memory,
Move you more vividly than I am moved
By those I daily see and touch and hear;
My dear ones here?

DAYA.

Nay, struggle as you will,
The ways of Heaven still are Heaven's ways;

What if your rescuer should prove to be
The chosen instrument by whom his God,
Whose champion he is, hath fore-ordained
That you should be transported to the land
And to the race for whom 'tis manifest
Your birth intended you?

RECHA.

Oh, Daya, dear,
Must you still harp on idle prate like this?
Your head is haunted by the strangest whims.
His God, forsooth, whose champion he is!
Whose chattel, then, is God?—what sort of God
Is that a man can claim as his alone,
And needs a man to be his champion?
And how know we the special spot of earth
For which we're destined, if it be not that
On which we first drew breath?—fie, Daya, fie!
Father would frown to hear you talk like this.
What has he done to you that ever thus
You paint my happiness so far from him?
How has he wronged you, that you ever strive
To mingle *your* indigenous flowers or weeds
Amid pure reason's seeds so wisely sown
By him within my soul? Nay, Daya dear,
He would not gladly have your gaudy blooms
In my heart's soil; and I must tell you too,
However bravely they might clothe that soil,
They sap its essence and exhaust its force;
Their sickly odor makes my senses reel;
Your head is more accustomed to their fume;

I do not chide you for the stouter nerves
Which render it supportable to you;
It likes not me. Your precious angel, too;
How nearly had that folly turned my brain!
E'en now I blush to think upon the farce
Whene'er I meet my father.

DAYA.

Farce, forsooth!
As if all wisdom were confined to you.
Oh, if I dared to speak!

RECHA.

And dare you not?
When, let me ask you, was I not all ear
When you extolled the heroes of your faith?
When grudged I admiration of their deeds;
Or when withheld the tribute of my tears
For all their sufferings? Their creed, I own,
Ne'er struck me as their most heroic point;
And then I drew more comfort from the thought
That true devotion to Almighty God
Hangs not upon the fancies we may hold
As to His nature or His attributes.
Oh, Daya dear, my father hath so oft
Expounded this to us; and you yourself
So oft have owned the justice of his view,
Why do you seek to undermine the faith
Which you yourself have aided him to build?
But, Daya, this is surely not a theme
With which most fitly to await our friend.

And yet—for me it may be; since for me
How much depends on whether he, too—Hark!
Hark, Daya, comes not some one to the door?
Oh, if it should be he!

SCENE II.—RECHA, DAYA, *and the* TEMPLAR.

AN ATTENDANT (*ushering in the* TEMPLAR.)
This way, sir knight!

RECHA.

'Tis he— my rescuer!
(*Profoundly agitated, she seems about to fall at the* TEMPLAR'S *feet.*)

TEMPLAR.

But for the wish
To shun this scene, I had appeared ere now.

RECHA.

My wish is, at the feet of this proud man,
To thank my God alone—and not the man.
The man desires no thanks; ay, no more thanks
Than does the water jar which in his hands
Was busied in extinguishing the flames,
Passively filled and emptied passively,
With ne'er a thought of me. Just so the man.
Blind chance alone impelled him 'mid the flames;
Blind chance it was which cast me in his arms;
And there I lay by sheer mechanic chance,

As any spark upon his mantle might,
Until some other chance expelled us both
From out the fire. What is there here for thanks?
In Europe often wine impels a man
To stranger things than this; and Templars, sure,
Are bound to do no less—ay, sure they're bound,
Like somewhat better educated dogs,
To pluck alike from water and from fire.

TEMPLAR (*who has heard her words with wonder and emotion*).

Oh, Daya, Daya, if, in tortured hours
Of care and choler, my ungracious mood
May have incensed you, why retail to her
Each hasty word that then escaped my lips?
That, Daya, was too spiteful a revenge;
Yet if in future you'll interpret me
To her in kinder terms——

DAYA.

Methinks, sir knight,
The little stabs you levelled at her heart
Have wrought therein but little harm to you.

RECHA.

But can it be you've been a prey to care,
And yet have been more chary of your grief
Than of your life!

TEMPLAR.

My gentle, kindly child!
Oh, how my ravished soul is now possessed

By eye and ear! This never was the maid,
Oh no, it cannot be the maid I snatched
From out the fire; for who could have beheld
A maiden such as this, and failed to snatch
Her witching form from out the fieriest fire?
Who could have hesitated? but in sooth
She was disguised, distorted by affright.
(*He pauses, rapt in admiration of her.*)

RECHA.

And yet I find you just the same as then.
(*She pauses, then resumes, to interrupt his reverie.*)
Now say, sir knight, where you have been so long;
And I might even ask—where are you now?

TEMPLAR.

I am, perhaps, where I ought not to be.

RECHA.

And been, perhaps, where you should not have been;
This is not well.

TEMPLAR.

I've been upon the mount;
Mount—Sinai, is it? Ay, men call it so.

RECHA.

On Sinai, have you? I am glad of that,

For now I may discover for a fact
Whether 'tis true that—— (*She hesitates.*)

TEMPLAR.

Whether what is true?
That there the very spot may yet be seen
Where Moses stood in presence of his God?

RECHA.

Oh no, not that; since wheresoe'er he stood,
He *must* have stood in presence of his God;
Of that I am sure. I only wished to know
Whether 'tis true that to ascend that mount
Is far less toilsome than descent from it;
For look, with all the hills that e'er I've climbed
'Twas just the opposite. But how, sir knight,
You turn away, and will not look on me.

TEMPLAR.

Because I'd rather hear you.

RECHA.

Nay, methinks
It is because you fain would hide from me
Your scorn of my simplicity. You smile
Because I have not asked you weightier things
Regarding that most holy hill of hills;
Is it not so?

TEMPLAR.

In that case I must now
Again look in your eyes. Why cast them down,
Or why suppress your smile? Why seek to hide

That which I fain would read within your looks,
That which your fitful features speak so plain?[1]
Ah, Recha, Recha, well did Nathan say,
'Oh, if you knew her!'

RECHA.

Who said that to you,
And in respect of whom?

TEMPLAR.

Your father did;
'Oh, if you knew her,' were the words he said,
And said of you.

DAYA.

Have I not said it too,
And many a time?

TEMPLAR.

But tell me where he is;
Where is your father? Closeted as yet
With Saladin?

RECHA.

He must be.

TEMPLAR.

What! still there?
Oh, I forgot. No, no, he can't be there;
He surely must be waiting for me now
Down there beside the cloister. Ay, 'twas so

[1]See Note 29.

That we arranged together—pardon me,
I go to fetch him.

DAYA.

Nay, leave that to me;
Stay here, sir knight; I'll fetch him here at once.

TEMPLAR.

Not so, not so; he yonder looks for me,
And not for you. Besides, it well might be—
Who knows?—it well might chance, with Saladin—
You do not know the Sultan—possibly
He's met with trouble; trust me, there is risk.
Should I not hasten to him?

RECHA.

Risk! what risk?

TEMPLAR.

Danger for him, for you, for me, unless
I quickly go to him. (*He goes.*)

SCENE III.—RECHA *and* DAYA.

RECHA.

Daya, what *can* it mean?
So sudden—so abrupt! What drives him hence?

DAYA.

E'en let him go. Methinks 'tis no bad sign.

RECHA.

A sign?—of what?

DAYA.

That something works within;
Boils in his blood—yet must not over-boil.
E'en let him be—I think 'tis now *your* turn.

RECHA.

My turn? Why, Daya, you become, like him,
A riddle to me.

DAYA.

Well, I mean that soon
It may be in your power to pay him back
For all the suffering he caused to you;
But be not too revengeful, too severe.

RECHA.

You best can tell the meaning of your words.

DAYA.

But tell me, is your calm restored at last?

RECHA.

Ay, that it is, thank Heaven.

DAYA.

And now confess
His want of calm rejoices you in turn,
And that you owe the calm you now enjoy
To his unrest.

RECHA.

If so, I know it not;
The most I'm able to confess to you
Is that it fills me with astonishment
How such a sudden tempest in my breast
Should be succeeded by this sudden calm.[1]
His look, his speech, his every gesture seem
To have—to have—

DAYA.

Appeased your hunger?

RECHA.

No;
I will not say appeased it; far from that.

DAYA.

Well, dulled the edge of it at least.

RECHA.

Perhaps;
Since you will have it so.

DAYA.

Oh, no, not I.

RECHA.

To me he must be ever dear,—more dear
Than life itself, though haply now my pulse
Flutters no longer at his very name,
And though the lightest thought of him has ceased

[1]See Note 30.

To stir my bosom with a swifter throb—
But wherefore chatter thus? Come, Daya, come,
Let us once more unto the lattice hie
That looks toward the palms.

DAYA.

So then, it seems,
The craving hunger's not yet quite appeased.

RECHA.

Nay, now I'll see the palms themselves once more;
Not merely him beneath them.

DAYA.

This cold fit
Heralds another fever-fit, I fear.

RECHA.

How cold? I am not cold. Can I not see,
With equal pleasure, what I calmly see?

SCENE IV.—*An Audience-chamber in the Palace of the Sultan.*

SALADIN *and* SITTAH.

SALADIN (*addressing an attendant*).

Bring the Jew here as soon as e'er he comes.
(*To* SITTAH.)
He seems, forsooth, in no great haste to come.

SITTAH.

Belike he was not to be found at once.

SALADIN.

Ah, sister, sister!

SITTAH.

Saladin, you look
As if a battle were before you.

SALADIN.

Ay;
And one with weapons I've ne'er learned to wield.
I must dissemble here, inspire alarm,
And set my traps, and play the hypocrite;
When could I do the like; where learned I that?
And all this I must practise now,—for what?
For what, indeed? to fish for filthy gold;
Bully a Jew to make him yield his hoards!
Is Saladin at last reduced to this?
To such base practices? and all to win
The very paltriest of paltry things!

SITTAH.

But even paltry things, when scorned too much,
Can take revenge on us.

SALADIN.

Alas, 'tis true;
And what if this same Jew should prove to be
As good and wise as Hafi said he was?

SITTAH.

If that be so, your difficulty's gone;
The snare is needed not for such as he,
But for your greedy, grasping, fearful Jew,
Not for your good and wise one,—this Jew, then,
Were ours already with no need of snares,
And if he's not, at least you'll have the treat
Of hearing how a man like this will speak;
With what audacious firmness he may strive
At once to rend your toils, or else, perhaps,
How craftily and with what sly pretence
He'll wriggle out of them.

SALADIN.

Ay, that is true:
I like the thought of it.

SITTAH.

So nothing now
Need further harass you; for if he be
One of the common sort; if he should prove
Merely a Jew like any other Jew,
Why, then you need not blush to seem to him
Just what he fancies other men to be;
He who could show himself to one like that
In fairer colors, would appear to him
No better than a fool.

SALADIN.

And must I, then,
Act evilly that thus the evil man
May not think evil of me?

SITTAH.

Surely so,
If you can call it acting evilly
To use a thing according to its kind.

SALADIN.

What is there that a woman's wit contrives
That it can not excuse!

SITTAH.

Excuse, indeed!

SALADIN.

And yet I fear this fine and fragile scheme
May break in my coarse hand; a thing like this
Must needs be worked as it has been conceived,
With due astuteness and dexterity;
But be it so—I'll dance as best I may,
And yet I'd liefer caper ill than well.

SITTAH.

Rely not all so little on yourself;
I'll answer for you, if you only try.
'Tis strange that men of such a stamp as you
So gladly would persuade us that the sword,
The sword alone, hath raised them up so high;
The lion is ashamed, forsooth, to hunt
With the sly fox—but, then, he is ashamed
Not of the cunning—only of the fox!

SALADIN.

Strange too that women love to drag the man

Down to their level!—But now, Sittah, go;
I think I know my lesson pretty well.

SITTAH.

What?—must I go?

SALADIN.

You would not, sure, remain?

SITTAH.

If not just here, at least I'd like to wait
In the adjoining room.

SALADIN.

To listen there?
No, no, my sister, if I'm to succeed;
Out, out,—the curtain rustles—here he comes,
I'll take good care you do not loiter here.
(*As* SITTAH *withdraws by one door,* NATHAN *enters by another.* SALADIN *seats himself.*)

SCENE V.—SALADIN *and* NATHAN.

SALADIN.

Draw nearer, Jew—still nearer—close to me;
And without fear.

NATHAN.

Nay, fear is for your foes.

SALADIN.

You call you Nathan?

NATHAN.

Yes.

SALADIN.

Nathan the Wise?

NATHAN.

No.

SALADIN.

Well then, if you don't, the people do.

NATHAN.

The people?—possibly.

SALADIN.

Do you suppose
I think so lightly of the people's voice?
Long have I wished to look upon the man
They call the Wise.

NATHAN.

What if they called him that
Only in jest; and what if wise to them
Meant only shrewd—the shrewd man only he
Who rightly knows wherein his profit lies?

SALADIN.

You mean his truest profit, I presume?

NATHAN.

Then the most selfish were the shrewdest man;

Then wise and shrewd would mean the self-
same thing.

SALADIN.

You're preaching what your practice contradicts.
Man's truest interests, which lie concealed
From vulgar souls, are not concealed from you;
Or, at the least, you've tried to find them out;
Have pondered over them, and this alone
Proves you are wise.

NATHAN.

Which all men think they are.

SALADIN.

A truce to modesty—'tis ever apt
To nauseate a man who only seeks
To hear a word of downright common sense.
(*Springing up.*)
Come, let us to the point—but mark me, Jew,
Be frank—be only frank!

NATHAN.

Sultan, be sure
That I shall serve you so as to be held
Worthy of further custom at your hands.

SALADIN.

How would you serve me?

NATHAN.

You shall have the best
Of all I have, and at the fairest price.

SALADIN.

Whatever do you talk of? Surely not
About your wares—my sister possibly
May chaffer with you. (*Aside.*) This for
Sittah's ear,
In case she's listening behind the door—
(*Continuing to* NATHAN.)
But with the trader I have nought to do.

NATHAN.

Then, Sultan, doubtless you would wish to learn
If in my wanderings I've noted aught
Touching the plans or movements of your foes,
Who without doubt are stirring once again,
If I may frankly speak.

SALADIN.

Nor yet is this
My purpose with you. I already know
All that I need of this.

NATHAN.

Then, sire, command.

SALADIN.

I want your teaching as to something else;
Something far different—and since it seems
You are so wise, now tell me, I entreat,
What human faith, what theologic law,
Hath struck you as the truest and the best?

NATHAN.

Sire, I'm a Jew.

SALADIN.

And I a Mussulman;
And here we have the Christians to boot;
Of these three faiths one only can be true;
A man like you would never take his stand
Where chance or birth has cast him; or, if so,
'Tis from conviction, reasonable grounds,
And choice of that which is the best,—well, then,
Tell me your view, and let me hear your grounds,
For I myself have ever lacked the time
To rack my brains about it. Let me know
The reasons upon which you found your faith—
In confidence, of course—that I may make
That faith my own. How, Nathan, do you start,
And prove me with your eye?—it well may be
No Sultan e'er before had such a whim;
And yet it seems not utterly beneath
Even a Sultan's notice. Speak then, speak;
Or haply you would wish a little space
To think it over—well, I give it you.—
(*Aside.*)
I'd like to know if Sittah's listening now;
I'll go and see; I fain would hear from her
How I have played my part.—Now, Nathan, think,
Think quickly on it—I'll be back anon.
(*He goes into the adjoining chamber, whither* SITTAH *had previously gone.*)

SCENE VI.—NATHAN *alone.*

'Tis strange, 'tis marvellous! what can it mean?
What can he want? I thought he wanted gold,
And now it seems that what he wants is *Truth!*
And wants it, too, as prompt and plump as if
Truth were a minted coin—nay, if he sought
Some obsolete coinage valued but by weight;
That might have passed. But such a brand-new coin,
Vouched by the stamp and current upon change!
No—truth indeed is not a thing like that.
Can it be hoarded in the head of man
Like gold in bags? Nay, which is here the Jew,
He or myself? And yet, might he not well
In truth have sought the truth? But then, the thought,
The mere suspicion, that he put the case
But as a snare for me! That were *too* small!—
Too small? Nay, what's too petty for the great?
He blurted out the theme so bluntly too;
Your friendly visitor is wont to knock
And give you warning ere he beats you up.
I must be on my guard. How best be that?
I cannot play the downright bigot Jew,
Nor may I wholly cast my Jewish slough,
For if I'm not the Jew, he then might ask
Why not a Mussulman?—I have it now!
Ay, this may serve me—idle tales amuse
Not children only—well, now let him come.

SCENE VII.—SALADIN *and* NATHAN.

SALADIN (*to himself*).

And so the coast was clear.
(*To* NATHAN.)
I trust I've come
Not too soon back; I hope you've ended now
Your meditation—tell me the result;
There's none to hear us.

NATHAN.

Would that all the world
Might hear our colloquy!

SALADIN.

Is Nathan then
So certain of his point? Ha! that I call
A wise man truly—ne'er to blink the truth,
To hazard everything in quest of it;
Body and soul itself, and goods and life.

NATHAN.

Ay, when 'tis needful, or can profit us.

SALADIN.

Henceforth I'll hope to have a right to bear
One of the many names by which I'm dubbed,
"Reformer of the World and of the Law."

NATHAN.

In sooth it is a fair and goodly name;
But, Sultan, ere I tell you all my thought,
Let me relate to you a little tale.

SALADIN.

Why not? I've ever had a love for tales
When well narrated.

NATHAN.

Ah, the telling well,
That scarcely is my forte.

SALADIN.

Again your pride,
Aping humility—tell on, tell on.

NATHAN.

Well then:—[1]In hoar antiquity there dwelt
In eastern lands a man who had received
From a loved hand a ring of priceless worth.
An opal was the stone it bore, which shot
A hundred fair and varied hues around,
And had the mystic power to render dear
Alike to God and man whoever wore
The ring with perfect faith. What wonder, then,
That eastern man would never lay it off,
And further made a fixed and firm resolve
That it should bide for ever with his race.
For this he left it to his dearest son,
Adding a stringent clause that he in turn
Should leave it to the son he loved the most,
And that in every age the dearest son,
Without respect to seniority,
By virtue of the ring alone should be

[1]See Note 31.

The lord of all the race. Sultan, I ask
If you have marked me well.

SALADIN.

Ay, ay,—proceed.

NATHAN.

And thus the ring came down from sire to son,
Until it reached a father of three sons
Each equally obedient to his will,
And whom accordingly he was constrained
To love alike. And yet from time to time,
Whene'er the one or other chanced to be
Alone with him, and his o'erflowing heart
Was not divided by the other two,
The one who stood beside him still would seem
Most worthy of the ring; and thus it chanced
That he by kindly weakness had been led
To promise it in turn to each of them.
This state of matters lasted while it could,
But by-and-by he had to think of death,
And then this worthy sire was sore perplexed.
He could not brook the thought of breaking faith
With two dear sons to whom he'd pledged his word;
What now was to be done? He straightway sends
In secret for a skilled artificer,
And charges him to make two other rings
Precisely like the first, at any cost.
This the artificer contrives to do,

And when at last he brings him all three rings
Even the father can't say which is which.
With joyful heart he summons then his sons,
But singly and apart, bestows on each
His special blessing, and his ring—and dies.
You hear me, Sultan?

SALADIN (*looking aside in perplexity*).

Ay, I hear, I hear;
Come, make an end of it.

NATHAN.

I'm at the end;
For what's to follow may be well conceived.
Scarce was the father dead, each several son
Comes with his ring and claims to be the lord
Of all his kindred. They investigate,
Recriminate, and wrangle—all in vain—
Which was the true original genuine ring
Was undemonstrable——

(*After a pause, during which he closely marks the* SULTAN.)

Almost as much
As now by us is undemonstrable
The one true faith.

SALADIN.

Nathan, is this to pass
For answer to my question?

NATHAN.

Sultan, no;
'Tis only meant to serve as my excuse

For better answer. How could I presume
E'er to pronounce distinction 'tween the rings
The father purposely designed to be
Quite indistinguishable?

SALADIN.

Rings, forsooth!
Trifle not with me thus. I should have thought
The three religions which I named to you
Were easy to distinguish, if alone
By difference of dress and food and drink.

NATHAN.

But not by fundamental difference.
Are they not founded all on history,
Traditional or written? History
Must still be taken upon trust alone;
And who are they who best may claim our trust?
Surely our people, of whose blood we are;
Who from our infancy have proved their love,
And never have deceived us, save, perchance,
When kindly guile was wholesomer for us
Than truth itself. Why should I less rely
Upon my ancestors than you on yours;
Or can I ask of you to give the lie
To your forefathers, merely to agree
With mine?—and all that I have said applies
To Christians as well. Is this not so?

SALADIN (*aside*).

Now, by the living God, the man is right;
I must be silent.

NATHAN.

Let us now return
Once more unto our rings. As I have said,
The sons now sued each other; each of them
Swore to the judge he had received his ring
Straight from his father's hand—as was the fact—
And that, too, after he had long enjoyed
His father's promise to bequeath the ring
To him alone—which also was the truth;
Each vowed the father never could have proved
So false to him; and rather than believe
A thing like this of such a loving sire,
He was constrained—however loath he was
To think unkindly of his brethren—
To charge them both with some nefarious trick,
And now he would unmask their treachery
And be avenged for such a cruel wrong.

SALADIN.

Well, and the Judge? for I am fain to hear
What you will make *him* say,—tell on, tell on.

NATHAN.

The Judge pronounced—Unless you bring your sire,
And place him here before the judgment-seat,
I must dismiss your suit. Think you I'm here
For solving riddles?—or perhaps you wait
Until the genuine ring declares itself.
Yet stay—you said the genuine ring contains

The magic power to make its wearer loved
More than all else, in sight of God and man;
This must decide the case—the spurious ring
Will not do this—say, which of you is he
The other two most love?—what, no reply?
Your rings would seem to work reflexively,
Not on external objects; since it seems
Each is enamoured of himself alone.
Oh, then, all three of you have been deceived,
And are deceivers too; and all three rings
Are spurious alike—the genuine ring
Was lost, most likely, and to hide its loss,
And to supply its place, your father caused
These three to be made up instead of it.

SALADIN.

Bravo! bravo!

NATHAN.

And then the Judge resumed—
Belike ye would not relish my advice
More than the judgment I have now pronounced;
In that case, go—but my advice is this:
Accept the case precisely as it stands;
If each of you in truth received his ring
Straight from his father's hand, let each believe
His own to be the true and genuine ring.
Perhaps your father wished to terminate
The tyranny of that especial ring
'Mid his posterity. Of this be sure,
He loved you all, and loved you all alike,

Since he was loath to injure two of you
That he might favor one alone; well, then,
Let each now rival his unbiased love,
His love so free from every prejudice;
Vie with each other in the generous strife
To prove the virtues of the rings you wear;
And to this end let mild humility,
Hearty forbearance, true benevolence,
And resignation to the will of God,
Come to your aid,—and if, in distant times,
The virtues of the genuine gem be found
Amid your children's children, they shall then,
When many a thousand years have rolled away,
Be called once more before this judgment-seat,
Whereon a wiser man than I shall sit
And give his verdict—now, begone. Thus spake
That sapient Judge.

SALADIN.

My God!

NATHAN.

Oh, Saladin,
Could you but be that wiser promised man!

SALADIN (*stepping forward and grasping* NATHAN'S *hand*).

Dust that I am and nothingness!—oh, no,
Oh, no!

NATHAN.

What ails thee, Sultan?

SALADIN.

Nathan, no;
The thousand thousand years of that wise Judge
Are not yet passed; nor is his judgment-seat
For Saladin,—now go—but be my friend.

NATHAN.

And had the Sultan nought but this to say?

SALADIN.

Nothing.

NATHAN.

What?—nothing?

SALADIN.

Nought—why do you ask?

NATHAN.

I fain had hoped occasion to prefer
A prayer to you.

SALADIN.

Occasion?—out with it.

NATHAN.

E'en now I'm come from off a distant round
In which I have recovered many a debt,
And now I've almost too much ready cash;
The times are growing critical again,
And scarce I know where to bestow my gear;
So I bethought me you might possibly—
Since war, when at the door, needs store of gold—

I thought that peradventure you might use
A part of mine.

SALADIN (*scanning him keenly*).

Nathan, I will not ask
Whether Al Hafi has been at your ear,
Or whether some suspicion of your own
Hath led you of your own accord to make
This offer to me.

NATHAN.

Some suspicion, sire?

SALADIN.

I well deserve it. Nathan, pardon me—
What boots concealment? I confess that now
I was upon the point——

NATHAN.

To ask, I trust,
This very thing of me.

SALADIN.

Just so.

NATHAN.

Well then,
We now shall both be suited equally;
But if I do not send you all my gold,
The youthful Templar is the cause of this;
Methinks you know him. I have yet to pay
A heavy debt to him.

SALADIN.

The Templar—what,
You surely would not prop my deadliest foes;
You never would assist them with your gold?

NATHAN.

I speak of this one only—he whose life
You spared.

SALADIN.

What's this you now remind me of?
Ay, I had utterly forgot the youth;
You know him, Nathan? Say, where is he now?

NATHAN.

Know you not how your clemency to him
Hath flowed through him in blessing to myself,
And how he risked his newly-granted life
To save my darling daughter from the flames?

SALADIN.

Ha! did he so?—he looked like one who would;
That truly had my Assad also done,
Whom he resembles so. Is he still here?
If so, then bring him straight. I've told so much
Unto my sister of that brother dear
Whom she ne'er knew, that I must let her see
His very counterfeit—ay, bring him here,
And quickly. See how out of one good deed,
Though 'twas begotten of a moment's whim,
How many other goodly deeds may flow!
Go, bring him.

NATHAN.

That I will—our other pact
Holds good between us? (*He goes.*)

SALADIN.

Ah, I now regret
I did not let my sister hear our talk.
Let me to her at once; though hardly now
Can I repeat the half of all that's passed.
(*He goes.*)

SCENE VIII.—*Under the palm-trees, and near the cloister, where the* TEMPLAR *is awaiting* NATHAN.

TEMPLAR (*in vehement conflict with himself*).

Here stands the panting quarry run to earth—
'Tis well; I would not now more closely probe
What's passing in me, nor essay to guess
What yet may pass. Enough, it is in vain
That I have fled—and yet I could do nought
But seek to flee—now come whate'er may come!
The stroke o'ertook me all too suddenly
For me to shun it, though I struggled hard;
And now I've been constrained to look on her
Whom I so long refrained to look upon—
To look on her!—and then the fixed resolve
Never again to lose her from my sight!
What is resolve, if barren of result?

And I have only suffered passively.
To see her, and to feel myself inwove
In all her being, was a thing of course.
To live apart from her's unthinkable;
'Twould be my death, and wheresoe'er we go
After we die, e'en there 'twould be my death.
Is this then love?—and does a Templar love?
A Christian love a Jewish maid in sooth?
What doth it matter?—in the Promised Land,
Land therefore ever to be praised by me,[1]
I've laid aside full many a prejudice.
What of my Order? Nay, as Templar I
Am dead—was from that moment dead to it
Which made me prisoner to Saladin.
This very head which Saladin hath spared,
Is it the self-same head I used to wear?
No, 'tis a new one, which knows nought of all
That once was babbled to my former one,
And bound me once; and 'tis a better one,
More fitted for my father's native skies;[2]
Ay, *that* I feel—now only I begin
To think as once my father must have thought,
Unless they've told me fables touching him—
Fables perhaps, yet credible enough,
Which ne'er appeared more credible to me
Than now, when I would seem to run the risk
Of stumbling where he fell; and if he fell,
Better to fall with men than stand with boys.
His own example guarantees to me
His approbation; and what living man's

[1]See Note 32. [2]See Note 33.

Concerns me else? What, Nathan's? Nay, from
him
I well may reckon on encouragement,
Not cold approval only. What a Jew!
Who yet affects to be no more than Jew.
He comes, in haste, and glows with radiant joy;
Who e'er came otherwise from Saladin?
Ho! Nathan, ho!

SCENE IX.—NATHAN *and the* TEMPLAR.

NATHAN.

Ha! is it you, sir knight?

TEMPLAR.

You've tarried with the Sultan very long.

NATHAN.

Nay, not so very long; in going there
I was delayed. Ah, truly, Curd, the man
Equals his reputation; nay, his fame
Is but the pale reflexion of himself.
But first and foremost let me say at once
The Sultan wills——

TEMPLAR.

Wills what?

NATHAN.

To speak with you;
Wills that you go to him without delay;

First come with me a moment to my house,
Where I have somewhat to arrange for him;
And then to Saladin.

TEMPLAR.

Nathan, your house
I ne'er again will enter till——

NATHAN.

What's this?
So you've been there already; ay, and seen
And spoken to her. Well, come, tell me all;
How like you Recha?

TEMPLAR.

More than words could say.
But see her again,—nay, that I'll never do;
Never, unless you promise on the spot
That I may ever ever look on her.

NATHAN.

How mean you, then, that I interpret this?

TEMPLAR (*falling on* NATHAN'S *neck*).

My father!

NATHAN.

What is this, young man?

TEMPLAR (*quitting his embrace*).

Not son?
I do entreat you, Nathan.

NATHAN.

Dear young man!

TEMPLAR.

Not son? Oh, Nathan, I conjure you now
By holy Nature's strongest, earliest ties—
Respect not later shackles more than these,—
Let it content you here to be a *man;*
Thrust me not from you.

NATHAN.

Dearest friend!

TEMPLAR.

And son?
Not son? Not even now—not now,
When gratitude hath built the bridge for love
Unto your daughter's heart. Not even now,
When the two passions waited but your nod
To melt in one?[1] What, Nathan, silent still?

NATHAN.

Young Templar, you are too precipitate.[2]

TEMPLAR.

How can it be that I surprise you now
With your own thought? or haply on my lips
You recognize it not—precipitate!

NATHAN.

But, Templar, this before I even know

[1]See Note 34. [2]See Note 35.

Which branch of Stauffens you're descended
from.

TEMPLAR.

What say you? At a moment such as this,
Is't possible your breast is stirred by nought
But idle curiosity?

NATHAN.

Nay, hear—
In former days I knew a Stauffen well
Whose name was Conrad.

TEMPLAR.

Well, what if my sire
Bore just that very name?

NATHAN.

Was such the fact?

TEMPLAR.

And I'm myself called after him, for Curd
And Conrad are the same.

NATHAN.

My Conrad, then,
Was not your father; for my Conrad was,
Like you, a Templar, and was never wived.

TEMPLAR.

Oh, for all that——

NATHAN.

What mean you?

TEMPLAR.

He might well
Have been my father still.

NATHAN.

Nay, now you jest,

TEMPLAR.

And you in turn are too punctilious;
A fig for sneers at bastards and the like;
The stock, I trow, is not to be despised;[1]
But spare me from my proofs of pedigree,
And I on my part will leave yours alone;
Not that I had the shadow of a doubt
Of your ancestral tree—nay, God forbid!
For doubtless you could tell it leaf by leaf
Right up to Abraham, and from that point
I know it and could swear to it myself.

NATHAN.

Now you grow bitter—do I merit this?
Have I as yet refused you anything?
I merely shrank from granting what you sought
At your first word—no more.

TEMPLAR.

No more than that?
Oh then, forgive me.

NATHAN.

Well then, come with me.

[1]See Note 36.

TEMPLAR.

Whither?—into your house?—Oh no, not that;
I fear another fire—I'll wait you here.
If I'm to see her any more, 'twill be
That I may see here whensoe'er I please;
If not, why then I have already seen
Far too much of her.

NATHAN.

Let me now despatch.
(*He goes.*)

SCENE X.—*The* TEMPLAR, *and presently* DAYA.

TEMPLAR (*as yet alone*).

Ay, truly, far too much. The brain of man
Grasps such a world of thought, and yet full oft
A trifle fills it to the bursting point,
No matter what the thing with which it teems.
Yet patience! and the spirit quickly works
The seething stuff into coherent thought,
Clears all within, and order comes again.
Do I then love—and loved I ne'er before,
Or was the feeling which I took for love
Not love at all; and is true love indeed
Only what now I feel?

DAYA (*approaching stealthily from one side*).

Sir knight, sir knight!

TEMPLAR.

Who calls?—ha! Daya, you?

DAYA.

I've just contrived
To slip past Nathan as I came along,
But he might see us where we stand, so come,
Come nearer to me—here behind this tree.

TEMPLAR.

What is it now, and why this mystery?

DAYA.

Ay, 'tis about a secret that I come;
A double one indeed—one known to me,
And one to you, sir knight,—let us exchange,
If you will tell me yours I'll tell you mine.

TEMPLAR.

With pleasure, if you'll only kindly say
What you regard as mine; but that, I trow,
Will soon appear from yours; so now begin.

DAYA.

What, *I* begin? No, no, sir knight, not so;
You must do that—I'll follow—be assured
My secret cannot profit you unless
I first know yours; so quickly out with it,
For if I chance to worm it out myself,
Then you'll have told me nothing, and then mine
Remains with me, and you'll have lost your own;

And yet, poor knight, 'twere strange if any man
Could hope to hide a secret such as that
From any woman's eyes.

TEMPLAR.

Though he himself
Might be unconscious of it?

DAYA.

Even so;
And therefore I must be so much your friend
As now to tell you what your secret is.
But first explain why you so suddenly
Broke off our talk, and left us planted there,
And why you go not now to Nathan's house.
Has Recha wrought so little on your heart,
Or haply has she wrought on it too much?
Your bearing teaches me to understand
The frantic flutterings of the hapless bird
Limed to the twig—come, come, confess at once
You love her—love her e'en to madness—then
I'll tell you something.

TEMPLAR.

Madness?—of a truth,
You're right enough in that.

DAYA.

Admit the love,
And I'll condone the madness.

TEMPLAR.

Daya, sure
The thing's absurd upon its very face;
A Templar dote upon a Jewish maid!

DAYA.

'Twould seem in sooth a somewhat senseless thing;
And yet at times a certain thing may have
More sense than we suppose—nor would it be
So unexampled if our Saviour
Drew us to Him by paths the worldly wise
Spontaneously were little like to tread.

TEMPLAR.

A solemn thought! (*Aside.*) If I but substitute
For Saviour, Providence, she's right enough—[1]
You make me, Daya, more inquisitive
Than is my wont.

DAYA.

But, oh, this is the land
Of miracles[2]

TEMPLAR.

Well, of the marvellous;
Can it be otherwise, since all the world
Flocks here together. Well then, Daya dear,
Take as confessed the thing you seek to know
I love her—love her—and I cannot think
How I could live without her.

[1]See Note 37. [2]See Note 38.

DAYA.

Is it sure?
Then swear to me, sir knight, to make her yours;
Ay, swear to me that you will rescue her
Both here in time and in eternity.

TEMPLAR.

But how?—how *can* I?—can I swear to do
What is not in my power?

DAYA.

'Tis in your power;
I'll bring it now with but a single word
Within your power.

TEMPLAR.

I suppose you mean
Her father now is willing to consent.

DAYA.

Father, forsooth!—her father *must* consent.

TEMPLAR.

But, Daya dear, what mean you by that *must?*
He has not surely fallen among thieves;
I see no *must* about it.

DAYA.

Then he must
Make up his mind to *will* it; and he must
Gladly do so at last.

TEMPLAR.

What—must, and will!
What if I tell you I've already sought,
And sought in vain, to touch that chord in him?

DAYA.

What, and he fell not in accord with you?

TEMPLAR.

He broke into a most discordant note,
Which jarred me sorely.

DAYA.

What is this you say?
Can it be possible you let him see
The faintest shadow of a wish of yours
For Recha, and he didn't jump for joy,
But frostily drew back, and coldly spoke
Of difficulties?

TEMPLAR.

Ay, it came to that.

DAYA.

Then I'll not hesitate a moment more.
(*She pauses.*)

TEMPLAR.

And yet you're surely hesitating still.

DAYA.

The man in all things else is, oh, so good,
And I have ever owed so much to him;

But that he should refuse consent! God knows
My very heart could bleed to force his hand.

TEMPLAR.

I pray you, Daya, clear me in a word
Of all these doubts; or if you are yourself
Still doubtful whether that you now would say
Be right or wrong, shameful or laudable,
Then hold your peace, and I will e'en forget
That you had aught to hide.

DAYA.

That spurs me on
Instead of curbing me. So know, sir knight,
Recha's no Jewess—she's a Christian maid!

TEMPLAR (*with cold sarcasm*).

I wish you joy on safe delivery!
The pangs of labor must have racked you sore;
Go on with pious zeal to people heaven,
If you are powerless to people earth.

DAYA.

Doth my announcement merit such a gibe;
And can a Christian, a Templar too,
And one who loves her, feel so little joy
To know that Recha is a Christian?

TEMPLAR.

Ay, and especially the precious fact
That she's a Christian of *your* handiwork.

DAYA.

Ha! is it thus you understand me, sir?
Oh no, not so—I fain would see the one
Who could in truth convert her; 'tis her lot
Long to have been a Christian in form,
Though hindered from becoming one in fact.

TEMPLAR.

Explain, or go.

DAYA.

She was a Christian child,
Of Christian parents born, and is baptised.

TEMPLAR (*eagerly*).

And Nathan?

DAYA.

Nathan?—she's no child of his.

TEMPLAR.

What! Nathan not her father? Know you well
What now you say?

DAYA.

I know it is the truth—
A truth which oft has caused me bitter tears;
He's not her father.

TEMPLAR.

Only brought her up,
And represented her to be his child;
Reared for himself the Christian child as Jew?

DAYA.

'Tis sure he did so.

TEMPLAR.

And she never knew
What she was born—has never learnt from him
That she was born a Christian, not a Jew?

DAYA.

Never.

TEMPLAR.

Not only did he rear the child
In this belief, but left the maiden too
To grow in this delusion?

DAYA.

Ay, alas!

TEMPLAR.

What! Nathan could do this! Nathan the Wise,
Nathan the Good, could e'er allow himself
To stifle holy Nature's voice like this!
Thus to misguide the promptings of a heart
Which, left unto itself, had found a bent
Far different! Oh, Daya, what you now
Have trusted to me is a thing of weight,
And may have weighty consequences too,
I am amazed, and know not for the nonce
What is my duty—give me time to think—
Go now—he's like to pass this way again,
And might surprise us here.

DAYA.

Nay, God forbid!

TEMPLAR.

I'm quite unable to accost him now;
If you should meet him, only say from me
That we shall meet at Saladin's anon.

DAYA.

Let no reproach of him escape your lips.
This secret must at present be reserved
To lend the final impulse to our scheme,
And, touching Recha, to remove your doubts.
But when you take her to your western home,
Leave me not here.

TEMPLAR.

We'll think of it—now go.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*The cloister-alleys of the Convent.*

The LAY BROTHER, *and presently the* TEMPLAR.

LAY BROTHER (*to himself*).

Ay, ay, the Patriarch is doubtless right,
And yet the mission he encharged to me
Hath prospered scurvily. Why must he still
Commit such matters into hands like mine?
I love not to be sly, to cozen folk,
And poke my nose in other men's concerns;
I do not wish my hand in every pie.
Did I, forsooth, withdraw me from the world,
Touching my own affairs, but to become
Entangled more than ever with the world
For other men?

TEMPLAR (*approaching in haste*).

Good brother, here you are!
I've long been seeking you.

LAY BROTHER.

What, seeking me?

TEMPLAR.

Is't possible you have forgotten me?

LAY BROTHER.

Oh, no; I only thought it was not like
That I should ever see your face again;
And, sure, I hoped to God I never should;
He only knows how odious in my eyes
Was the proposal I was bound to make
To such a youth as you. God only knows
Whether I wished you'd lend a willing ear
Without a moment's hesitation, that
Which would have been so shameful in a knight.
Yet here you are! has then the thought revived,
And does it work upon you after all?

TEMPLAR.

Know you for what I've come? I scarce myself
Can tell you that.

LAY BROTHER.

Belike you've thought it o'er;
And now you think the Patriarch's not far wrong
In holding gold and credit may be won
Through his proposal; that a foe's a foe
Were he our guardian-angel seven times told,—
All this you've pondered over carefully,
And come to offer him your arm. Oh, God!

TEMPLAR.

My dear good man, pray have an easy mind,
I am not come for this, and not for this
Would I now see the Patriarch; on the point
Of which you speak, my mind is still unchanged,
Nor would I for the wealth of all the world

Forfeit the good opinion I have won
From such an upright pious man as you.
I've only come to sound the Patriarch
About a certain point.

LAY BROTHER (*looking timidly around him*).

What, *you* consult
The Patriarch? a knight consult a priest?

TEMPLAR.

Ay, for the point's a somewhat priestly one.

LAY BROTHER.

And yet a priest would ne'er consult a knight,
E'en on the knightliest point.

TEMPLAR.

Because your priest
Is privileged to err— a privilege
For which we knights by no means envy them.
I own that if I only had to act
For my own self, and were responsible
Unto myself alone, in such a case
I'd snap my fingers at your Patriarch.
But certain things I liefer would do ill
According to another's will, than well
According to my own. And yet, I see
Religion's self is but another name
For party zeal, and e'en the man who strives
To bring an open mind to any theme,
Still, without knowing it himself, upholds

The standard only of his own belief,
Blindly maintaining that it *must* be right.

LAY BROTHER.

I'd rather not discuss a point like this,
I scarcely understand the drift of it.

TEMPLAR (*aside*).

Let me consider what my object is,
Advice, or preachment? simple common sense,
Or priestly dogma?
(*To the* LAY BROTHER.)
Thanks, good brother, thanks
For this good hint; a fig for Patriarchs!
Be you my Patriarch; 'tis the Christian
Within the Patriarch I would now consult,
More than the Patriarch whom chance hath placed
Within the Christian. The case is this——

LAY BROTHER.

Oh sir, proceed no more, proceed no more;
You have misjudged me. He who knows too much
Hath many cares, and I have vowed myself
To one alone. Ha! this is fortunate,
See, by a happy chance he comes himself;[1]
Stay here, he hath already noted you.

[1]See Note 39.

SCENE II.—THE PATRIARCH, *advancing with priestly pomp along the cloisters, and the Preceding.*

TEMPLAR.

I'd liefer shun him—he were not my man;
A burly, ruddy, smiling prelate, sure;
And in such pomp!

LAY BROTHER.

I wish you saw him, sir,
What time he comes from court—just now he comes
But from a sick man's couch.

TEMPLAR.

How Saladin
Must then be cast into the shade!

PATRIARCH (*as he approaches, to the* LAY BROTHER).

Ho, there!
That surely is the Templar—what's his will?

LAY BROTHER.

I know not.

PATRIARCH (*approaching the* TEMPLAR, *while his train withdraw to the background, accompanied by the* LAY BROTHER).

How, sir knight, I'm wondrous glad
To see so brave a youth—you are indeed
So very young; something, by Heaven's help,
May come of you.

TEMPLAR.

Scarce, venerable sir,
More than has come of me already—nay,
More likely less.

PATRIARCH.

I would at least desire
That such a pious knight may flourish long
For our dear Christendom, and for the weal
And glory of the sacred cause of God;
Nor will this fail if with due modesty
Your youthful valor heed the ripe advice
Of prudent age. Say in what special thing
I now can serve you.

TEMPLAR.

With the very thing
In which my youth is lacking—with advice.

PATRIARCH.

Gladly—but counsel must be followed, sir.

TEMPLAR.

Not blindly.

PATRIARCH.

Who said blindly?—of a truth
No man should e'er omit to exercise
The reason which was given him by his God,
Where it is adequate—but is it so
In every case?—oh, no—for instance, now,
When God, through one of His own messengers,
That is, through any servant of His word,

Graciously designs to indicate a means
Whereby we may in any special way
Promote the weal of Christendom entire,
And on His holy Church,—in such a case,
Who would presume by reason's puny light
To cavil at the absolute will of Him
Who's reason's author?—who would dare to judge
The eternal laws of Heaven's majesty
By paltry canons of punctilio?[1]
Enough of this—now name the matter, sir,
As touching which you presently apply
For counsel at my hands.

TEMPLAR.

Most reverend sir,
Suppose a Jew who had an only child,
And that, a girl, whom he with tender care
Brought up in all good ways, and whom he loved
More than himself; and she upon her part
Returned his care with most devoted love.
Well now, suppose 'twas told to one of us
This maid was not the daughter of the Jew;
That he had picked her up in infancy,
Bought her—or stolen her—or what you will;
And that, she was in fact a Christian child,
Duly baptised; and that the Jew thought fit
To rear her as a Jewess, and gave out
She was a Jewess, and his daughter too.
Say, reverend father, in a case like this
What should be done?

[1]See Note 40.

PATRIARCH.

I'm horrified!—but first
Tell me, young sir, whether the case you've put
Is actual fact, or mere hypothesis;
Whether you've but imagined such a thing,
Or whether it has really occurred,
And still continues.

TEMPLAR.

Nay, I should have thought
That, merely to pronounce on such a case,
It mattered not unto your Reverence
Whether 'twas fact or fancy.

PATRIARCH.

Mattered not!
See how o'erweening human reason's prone
To err in ghostly things!—it matters much;
For if the case you've put be nothing more
Than some creation of your sportive wit,
It merits not a moment's serious thought,
And I'd refer you to the theatre[1]
Where points like this are argued *pro* and *con*
With no small pleasure of the auditors.
But if you've not been merely tickling me
With some dramatic quibble—if the case
Be sober fact—if such a thing as this
Has truly happened in our diocese,
And in our well-beloved Jerusalem,
Then, of a truth, sir knight—ay, then——

[1]See Note 41.

TEMPLAR.

What then?

PATRIARCH.

Then instantly the Jew must undergo
The utmost rigor of the penalties
Which Papal and imperial law alike
Prescribe for such a monstrous deed as this,
For such a scandalous outrage.

TEMPLAR.

Is it so?

PATRIARCH.

And know that the aforesaid laws prescribe
Unto the Jew who ventures to seduce
A Christian to apostasy—the stake—
The faggot——

TEMPLAR.

Ay?

PATRIARCH.

And how much more the Jew
Who forcibly hath torn a Christian child
From its baptismal bonds—for is not all,
All that is done to children merely force?
Except, I scarce need say, whate'er the Church
Does unto children.

TEMPLAR.

But suppose the child,
But for the kindly pity of the Jew,
Haply had perished in the direst want?

PATRIARCH.

It matters not—the Jew must still be burnt;
Better she perished here in direst want
Than thus be rescued for eternal woe.
Besides, what business had the Jew, forsooth,
Thus to anticipate the hand of God?
Without him God can rescue whom He will.

TEMPLAR.

Ay, and in spite of him can save a soul.

PATRIARCH.

It matters not—the Jew must surely burn.

TEMPLAR.

This grieves me much; the more so since 'tis said
He has not actually reared the girl
In his own faith; but in no faith at all,
And taught her neither more nor less of God
Than simple reason needs.

PATRIARCH.

It matters not;
The Jew must burn—on this account alone
Well doth he merit burning three times o'er.
What! let a child grow up an infidel!
Utterly fail to train an infant's mind
In the great obligation—to believe!
That is too bad—I wonder much, sir knight,
That you yourself——

TEMPLAR.

Most reverend sir, the rest,
Please God, I'll tell you in confessional.

PATRIARCH.

How, sir!—not straightway tell me all the tale?
Not even name to me the rascal Jew,
Or hale him here? Oh, then, I know my course,
I'll hie me on the spot to Saladin;
In virtue of the pact to which he's sworn
He's bound to shield us in the exercise
Of all the spiritual rights and points of faith
Which appertain to our most holy creed;
Thank God, we still have the original
Vouched by his hand and seal—ay, that we hold.
'Twill be an easy task to make him see
How baneful even for the State it were
For men to have no faith—all social ties
Would be disorganised and rent in twain
If men believed in nothing—out upon
Impiety like this!

TEMPLAR.

'Tis pity, sir,
Scant leisure will not suffer me to hear
Your goodly preachment out, for I am called
To Saladin.

PATRIARCH.

Is't possible?—well then——

TEMPLAR.

I'll e'en prepare him for your visit, sir,
Provided that your Reverence approve.

PATRIARCH.

Oh, oh, I know that you've found favor, sir,
With Saladin. I only trust you'll put
The best construction on me at the court;
My only motive is my zeal for God;
Where I exceed, I do it for His sake.
I pray you, sir, to weigh this matter well;
And sure, sir knight, I may as well suppose
That what you said just now about the Jew
Was a mere theoretic problem.

TEMPLAR.

Yes. (*He goes.*)

PATRIARCH.

But one I now will do my best to solve,
This well may prove to be another job
For brother Bonafides.
(*To the* LAY BROTHER.)
Come, my son.

SCENE III.—*A Chamber in the Palace of the Sultan. A band of slaves bearing numerous bags of gold, and piling them on the floor.*

SALADIN, *and presently* SITTAH.

SALADIN (*surveying the bags*).

Well, of a truth there seems no end to this;
Doth much o' the stuff remain?

A SLAVE.

As much again!

SALADIN.

Then bear to Sittah all the rest of it.
Where is Al Hafi? he shall forthwith take
All this into his charge—or, better still,
Shall I not straightway send it to my sire?
Here 'twill run through my fingers. Yet, in sooth,
A man grows hard at last, and now, methinks,
'Twill cost some skill to wheedle much from me.
Until our Egypt moneys come to hand
E'en hapless Poverty will have to shift
As best it may. I only hope we still
May meet the charges at the Sepulchre,[1]
Nor have to send these Christian pilgrims hence
With empty hands—and then——

SITTAH.

And I would ask,
Whatever shall I do with all that gold?

SALADIN.

First pay yourself whatever is your due,
And hoard the rest, if any still remain.

SITTAH.

Has Nathan not yet brought the Templar here?

SALADIN.

No, but he seeks him everywhere.

[1]See Note 42.

SITTAH.

Well, see:
As I was turning my old trinkets o'er,
See what I found among them.
(*She shows him a miniature portrait.*)

SALADIN.

Assad—ha!
'Tis he—'tis he—or rather once was he.
Ah, gallant boy, too early snatched away,
By thy dear side what was the deed of arms
I had not blithely ventured to achieve!
Leave me the portrait, Sittah, leave it here;
Ay, I remember it, I know it well;
He gave it to your elder sister Lilla
On that sad morning when he was so loth
To let him leave her arms. It was the last
On which he e'er rode forth—alas, alas,
I suffered him to go, and all alone!
Our Lilla died of grief, and ne'er forgave
That I had let him go so all alone.
He ne'er returned!

SITTAH.

Alack, poor Assad!

SALADIN.

Well,
One day we all shall go, and ne'er return.
Besides—who knows?—it is not death alone
That mars the promise of a youth like him;

No, he hath other foes, to whom full oft
The strongest like the weakest must succumb.
Well, be it as it may, I must compare
This portrait with the Templar. I would see
If fancy hath befooled me.

SITTAH.

'Tis for this
That I have brought it; meanwhile, give it me;
I'll tell you whether it resembles him;
A woman's eye best judges things like this.

SALADIN (*to an usher, who enters*).

Who's there? the Templar, say you? bid him come.

SITTAH.

Not to disturb you, or confuse the knight
With curious glances, let me draw aside.
(*She seats herself apart on a divan, and lets her veil fall.*)

SALADIN.

Ay, so—'tis well—(*to himself*). And now, to hear his voice!
I wonder how 'twill sound—my Assad's tones
Still slumber somewhere deep within my soul.

SCENE IV.—SALADIN *and the* TEMPLAR.

TEMPLAR.

Sultan, 'tis I,—your captive.

SALADIN.

Captive? how?
Unto the man to whom I granted life
Should I not also grant his liberty?

TEMPLAR.

What course behooves you it behooves not me
Now to pronounce, but first to learn from you.
Yet, Sultan, surely it would ill beseem
Either my calling or my character
To say I owe you any burning thanks
For my mere life—in any case 'tis still
At your disposal.

SALADIN.

Only use it not
Against me—nay, a pair of hands the more
I'm free to grant unto my enemy,
But not to grant him such a heart the more;
Oh no, not that. I find thee, gallant youth,
All that I pictured thee—thou art indeed
My Assad, soul and body. I might ask
Where hast thou hidden from me all these years;
In what dim grotto hast thou slept till now;
What land of Jinns, what kind Divinity,
Hath thus preserved thy blooming youth so fresh?

I might remind thee of the deeds we did
In other days—nay, I might chide thee now
For having kept one secret from my ken;
For hiding an adventure such as this;
Ay, I could do it, if I saw but thee,
And not myself as well. Now, be it so;
Of this sweet fantasy this much at least
Is solid fact, that in my autumn years
An Assad blooms for me again. Say, knight,
Art thou content with this?

TEMPLAR.

Whate'er may hap
To me from thee—no matter what it be—
My heart accepts with joy.

SALADIN.

That let us now
Prove on the instant. Wilt thou stay with me?
Christian or Mussulman, it matters not,
In the white mantle, or the Moslem robe,[1]
Turbaned, or with thy beaver—as thou wilt,
To me 'tis all the same, I ne'er have claimed
That the same bark should grow on every tree.

TEMPLAR.

Else hardly had'st thou been the man thou art,
The hero who belike had liefer been
A delver in the garden of the Lord.[2]

[1]See Note 43. [2]See Note 44.

SALADIN.

Nay, if thou think'st no worse of me than this,
E'en now we're half agreed.

TEMPLAR.

We're wholly so.

SALADIN (*offering him his hand*).

Then 'tis a bargain!

TEMPLAR (*grasping it*).

Ay, and with this hand
Receive far more than thou could'st e'er have wrung
By force from me; henceforth I'm all thine own.

SALADIN.

'Tis too much gain for any single day—[1]
But came he not with you?

TEMPLAR.

Who?

SALADIN.

Nathan.

TEMPLAR (*coldly*).

No,
I came alone.

SALADIN.

Oh, what a deed was yours!
And what shrewd luck it was that such a deed
Should work the happiness of such a man.

[1]See Note 45.

TEMPLAR.

Mayhap.

SALADIN.

So cold! fie, fie, young man. When God
Does good through us, we should not be so cold;
Not e'en from modesty itself should wish
To *seem* so cold.

TEMPLAR.

'Tis strange that in the world
Each single thing should have so many sides,
Of which full oft it cannot be conceived
How they may fit together.

SALADIN.

Ever cling
To that which is the best, and thank your God:
He knows how they may fit together. Still,
If you must be so scrupulous, young man,
Then I must be upon my guard with you;
I, too, unfortunately am a thing
Of many sides, and some of them, perchance,
May seem to you to fit not all too well.

TEMPLAR.

I smart at the rebuke, because in truth
Suspicion's not a common fault with me.

SALADIN.

Then say of whom you entertain it now;
'Twould seem 'tis Nathan. Is it possible?

You suspect Nathan! Speak, explain yourself;
Give me this first proof of your confidence.

TEMPLAR.

I've nought 'gainst Nathan—no, I'm only vexed
With my own self.

SALADIN.

And wherefore so?

TEMPLAR.

To think
That in my waking moments I could dream
A Jew could e'er unlearn to be a Jew.

SALADIN.

What mean you now? Out with this waking dream!

TEMPLAR.

Sultan, you know of Nathan's daughter. Well,
That which I did for her I merely did
Because I did it—it was chance alone.
Too proud to reap a crop of gratitude
Where I had never sown, from day to day
I scorned to look upon the girl again.
Her father then was absent—he returns;
He hears the tale, and straightway seeks me out;
Loads me with thanks—declares he hopes his child
Has won my favor; talks of prospects, prates
Of joyous days that possibly may come.

Enough—I let myself be thus cajoled.
I go with him—I see the maid, and find
Oh such a maid. Ah! Sultan, I must blush!

SALADIN.

What!—must you blush because a Jewish maid
Hath touched your heart?—nay, never tell me that.

TEMPLAR.

I blush to think that my impulsive heart,
Moved by the kindly prattle of the Jew,
Struggled so little against such a love;
Once more I madly sprang into the flames;
For now I sued—and now I was disdained!

SALADIN.

Disdained!

TEMPLAR.

The cautious sire did not indeed
Flatly reject me—but the cautious sire
Must make inquiries first—must think it o'er.
He thought perhaps that I had done the same,
Made due inquiry, weighed the *pros* and *cons,*
What time his daughter shrieked amid the flames?
By Heaven! 'tis verily a splendid thing
To be so wise and circumspect!

SALADIN.

Come, come,
Make some allowance for an aged man—
And then, how long do you suppose his doubts

Are like to last?—or think you he'll insist
That you must first become a Jew yourself?

TEMPLAR.

Who knows?

SALADIN.

Why, he who knows what Nathan is.

TEMPLAR.

The superstitions of our early years,
E'en when we know them to be nothing more,
Lose not for that their hold upon our hearts;
Not all are free who ridicule their chains.

SALADIN.

Ripely remarked—but Nathan's not like that.

TEMPLAR.

The worst of superstitions is to deem
Our special chains the most endurable——

SALADIN.

Perhaps—but, Nathan——

TEMPLAR.

And to these alone
To trust purblind humanity until
Its eye can bear the brilliant noon of truth.

SALADIN.

That well may be, perhaps, but Nathan's case
Is no such weakness.

TEMPLAR.

So I thought myself,
But how if this same paragon of men
Should happen to be such a downright Jew
That he has sought to seize on Christian babes
That he might bring them up as Jews—how then?

SALADIN.

But who says that of him?

TEMPLAR.

The girl herself
With whom he lures me on—with hope of whom
He fain would *seem* to pay me for a deed
He would not have it said I did for nought—
This very girl is not his child. She is
A kidnapped Christian waif.

SALADIN.

Whom ne'ertheless
He now will not consent to give to you?

TEMPLAR (*with vehemence*).

Whether he will or no, he's now found out;
The tolerant prater is unmasked at last;
I'll find the means to set the hounds on him,
This Jewish wolf in philosophic fleece,
Who'll rend his hide!

SALADIN (*with severity*).

Come, Christian, be calm!

TEMPLAR.

Christian, be calm! when Jew and Mussulman
May hotly play the Mussulman and Jew,
Must the poor Christian alone not dare
To play the Christian?

SALADIN (*with growing severity*).

Christian, be calm!

TEMPLAR (*more calmly*).

I own I feel the weight of the reproach
Compressed by Saladin in these two words;
How would your Assad have comported him
In such a case?

SALADIN.

No better than yourself;
With no less vehemence, perhaps—but say,
Who hath already taught you, like himself,
To sway me with a single word? In sooth,
If all be true that you have told me now,
I scarce therein can recognise my Jew.
Yet he is still my friend, and all my friends
Must dwell in harmony; so, be advised;
Proceed with caution—sacrifice him not
To the blind fury of your fanatics;
Breathe not a matter which your pious priests
Might well compel me to avenge on him;
Play not the Christian to spite the Jew,
Or Moslem either.

TEMPLAR.

Soon it would have been

Too late to think of saving him; but now
I thank the Patriarch's holy thirst for blood,
Which made me shudder to become his tool.

SALADIN.

How! went you to the Patriarch, forsooth,
Before you came to me?

TEMPLAR.

Sultan, I did,
In the first gust of passion, in the whirl
Of indecision—pardon me. I fear
You now no longer will discern in me
A likeness to your Assad.

SALADIN.

Save, indeed
This very fear itself[1]—methinks I know
The faults from which our very virtues spring;
Foster the virtues only, then the faults
With me shall work you little prejudice.
But leave me now—go and seek Nathan out,
E'en as he sought for you, and bring him here;
I now must see you reconciled to him.
And if in very truth you've set your heart
Upon this maid, be tranquil—she is yours.
And Nathan too must now be made to smart
For having dared to rear a Christian child
In total ignorance of swine's flesh—go.

(*The* Templar *withdraws.* Sittah *quits her seat on the divan, and advances.*)

[1]See Note 46.

Scene V.—Saladin *and* Sittah.

SITTAH.

'Tis marvellous!

SALADIN.

Well, Sittah, you'll allow
Our Assad must have been a goodly youth.

SITTAH.

Ay, if he was like this, and if 'twas not
The Templar's self who for this portrait sat.
But, Saladin, how could you e'er forget
To ask him who and what his parents were?

SALADIN.

And in especial who his mother was,
And if she ever was in Palestine;
Is that your drift?

SITTAH.

A precious thought of yours!

SALADIN.

Oh, nought more possible; our Assad was
So welcome amid handsome Christian dames,
And such a squire of handsome Christian dames,
That once, indeed, the rumor went—well, well,
We would not dwell on it—enough for me
I have him once again, and welcome him
With all his foibles, all the fitful moods
Of his warm heart. Oh, Nathan must indeed
Give him the maid—what think you?

SITTAH.

Give the maid!
Say, give her *up*.

SALADIN.

Just so; what right has he,
If not her father, to control her lot?
The man who saved her life by such a deed
Alone can enter on the rights of him
Who gave it.

SITTAH.

How then, brother, would it do
To take the girl at once to be your ward,
Withdrawing her from hands which have no more
The right to keep her?

SALADIN.

Where's the need for that?

SITTAH.

Well, not exactly need—I must confess
'Tis harmless curiosity alone
Suggests my counsel—there are certain men
Regarding whom I ever fain would know
The sort of maiden they can love.

SALADIN.

Well, then,
Send for her straight.

SITTAH.

Oh, may I, Saladin?

SALADIN.

Only spare Nathan's feelings—by no means
Must Nathan think that we would tear the girl
From him by force.

SITTAH.

Oh, never fear.

SALADIN.

Meanwhile
I must find out Al Hafi's whereabouts.

SCENE VI.—*Hall in* NATHAN'S *house, looking towards the palm trees, as in the opening scene. The wares and precious stuffs, lately brought by* NATHAN, *partly unpacked and displayed.* NATHAN *and* DAYA *contemplating them.*

DAYA.

Oh, all's magnificent!—most rare and choice;
All such as you alone could wish to give.
Whence comes this silver stuff with sprays of gold,
And what might be its price?—Oh, *that* I call
A bridal dress indeed!—no queen could wish
A braver one.

NATHAN.

Why just a bridal dress?

DAYA.

Well now, you haply did not think of that
What time you bought it; but in very truth
That and no other must it be—it looks
Expressly made for that—the snow-white ground,
Emblem of purity—the golden threads,
Which everywhere run snaking through the stuff,
Symbol of riches—look you, 'tis divine!

NATHAN.

What means this wealth of wit?—whose bridal dress
Would you describe with this symbolic lore;
Are you the bride perhaps?

DAYA.

Who?—I?

NATHAN.

Who, then?

DAYA.

I, gracious heavens!—I!

NATHAN.

Who is she, then?—
Whose bridal garment are you prating of?
All that you see is yours, and yours alone.

DAYA.

Mine!—meant for *me!*—not meant for Recha, then?

NATHAN.

That which I brought for Recha still lies packed
Within another bale—come, take the stuff;
Off with your trumpery.

DAYA.

No, tempter, no;
If they comprised the wealth of all the world
I would not touch them till you swear to me
To use this single opportunity,
The like of which God ne'er may send again.—

NATHAN.

Use what?—and opportunity for what?

DAYA.

Oh, look not so unconscious. In a word,
The Templar loves our Recha—make her his.
Thus your transgression will be closed at last,
That sin which I no longer can conceal;
Thus will she come once more 'mid Christian folk,
Once more be what she is, or be once more
That which she was; then, too, we could not say
That all your many kindly acts to us,
Which we can ne'er sufficiently requite,
Were nought but coals of fire upon your head.

NATHAN.

Harping once more upon your ancient harp!
Though haply fitted with an extra string,
Not well attuned, or like to hold.

DAYA.

How so?

NATHAN.

The Templar suits me, and should have my child
Sooner than e'er another in the world,
Were it not—well, have patience, I entreat.

DAYA.

Patience, forsooth!—why patience, I declare,
Is *your* old harp on which you ever strum.

NATHAN.

I ask if only for a few days more.
But see!—who's this who comes?—a monk, methinks;
Go, ask him what he wants.

DAYA.

What can he want?
(*She goes towards the Monk.*)

NATHAN.

Well, give him alms, and that before he asks.
(*To himself.*)
Would I could sound this Templar's history,
Without betraying what my object is!
For if I tell him this, and if it prove
That my surmise is groundless, then indeed
I shall have risked a father's rights in vain.

DAYA (*returning*).

The monk would speak with you.

NATHAN.

Then bid him come;
And you may leave me now.

SCENE VII.—NATHAN *and the* LAY BROTHER.

NATHAN (*still to himself*).

Oh, I would fain be Recha's father still!
And can I not be that, e'en though I cease
To bear the name? With her, in any case,
With her I must for ever bear the name,
If she but know how dear it is to me.
(*To the* LAY BROTHER.)
Good brother, say what I can do for you.

LAY BROTHER.

Not much—but oh, good Nathan, I rejoice
To see you still in health.

NATHAN.

You know me, then?

LAY BROTHER.

Ay, that I do—who knows you not?—your name
Hath been impressed on many a needy palm,
And mine still bears its stamp these many years.

NATHAN (*feeling in his purse*).

Well, brother, let me freshen it a bit.

LAY BROTHER.

Thanks; but 'twere robbery of poorer men;
I'll nought of you—but rather, by your leave,
I now would freshen up *my* name a bit
Within your mind, since I too can lay claim
Once to have placed within your hand a thing
Of no mean worth.

NATHAN.

Forgive me—I must blush—
Name it, and, to atone my heedlessness,
Take from me now its value seven times told.

LAY BROTHER.

Before all else, first hear how I myself
Only this very day was put in mind
Of that I pledged with you.

NATHAN.

You pledged with *me!*

LAY BROTHER.

Not long ago I filled a hermit's cell
On Quarantana, nigh to Jericho,[1]
When suddenly a band of Arab thieves
Pulled down my little chapel, razed my cell,
And dragged me off with them. By luck I fled,
And made my way unto the patriarch here

[1]See Note 47.

To crave of him some other little spot
Where I in solitude might serve my God
Until a peaceful death might end my days.

NATHAN.

Brother, I burn to know the rest—be brief;
What was the pledge—the pledge you left with me?

LAY BROTHER.

Anon, good Nathan;—well, the Patriarch
Promised that I should have a hermit's cell
On Tabor, on the earliest vacancy;
Meanwhile his orders were that I should wait
As a lay-brother in the convent here;
And here I am, good Nathan; and I long
A hundred times for Tabor every day,
Because the Patriarch ever foists on me
All sorts of tasks from which my soul recoils;
Such, for example——

NATHAN.

Nay, proceed, I pray.

LAY BROTHER.

I'm coming to it now. Some one, it seems,
This day has whispered in the Patriarch's ear
That somewhere here there dwells a certain Jew
Who's bringing up a certain Christian child
As his own daughter——

NATHAN (*with alarm*).

What!

LAY BROTHER.

Nay; hear me out.
Well then, the Patriarch has commissioned me
Forthwith, if possible, to trace this Jew,
Since he is vehemently stirred with wrath
At such an outrage, which appears to him
The very sin against the Holy Ghost;
That is to say, the sin which, of all sins,
Is held by us to be the greatest sin,
Except that, God be thanked, we scarcely know
In what it specially consists. But now
My drowsy conscience suddenly awoke,
And it occurred to me that I myself
Not long ago had haply given rise
To this unpardonable, deadly sin.
Now tell me whether, eighteen years ago,
A certain squire confided to your hands
A tiny maid of but a few weeks old?

NATHAN.

How's this? Well, truly—ay, it is the fact.

LAY BROTHER.

Nathan, look well on me. I was the squire!

NATHAN.

What! You?

LAY BROTHER.

The knight from whom I brought the babe
Was one Von Filneck, if I do not err;
Ay, Wolf von Filneck.

NATHAN.

Yes, that was the name.

LAY BROTHER.

It seems the mother had but lately died;
And then the knight had suddenly to flit,
Methinks to Gaza, where a mite like that
Could not go with him, so he bade me bear
The babe to you, and it was at Darun[1]
I gave it to you.

NATHAN.

That is so indeed.

LAY BROTHER.

'Twere little wonder if my memory
Deceived me after such a lapse of time;
And then I've served so many valiant knights,
And this one truly all too short a time;
Soon after that he fell at Ascalon;
He was a kindly knight.

NATHAN.

Ay, that he was;
And one to whom I owed a world of thanks,
Since more than once he saved me from the sword.

LAY BROTHER.

If so, you must have been the more rejoiced
To be the guardian of his little girl.

[1]See Note 48.

NATHAN.

Ay, you may think it.

LAY BROTHER.

Well, where is she now?
Surely she hath not died by any chance;
Oh, say not that she's dead,—for, if she lives,
And no one else be privy to her case,
All things may yet go well.

NATHAN.

Ha, think you so?

LAY BROTHER.

Now mark me, Nathan, thus I look at things:—
Whene'er I purpose to perform a deed
Good in itself, but bordering too close
On what is bad, I ever think it best
To leave the deed undone; since what is bad
Is always pretty palpable to us,
While what is good is seldom quite so plain,—
Now it was natural enough that you,
To do your best in bringing up the child,
Should treat her as your daughter. Very well,
You did the thing in perfect faith and love,
And is it right that you should smart for this?
I ne'er can see the justice of the case;
I own your conduct had been more discreet
Had you employed some other hand to rear
This Christian infant as a Christian;
But in that case the daughter of your friend
Had lacked your love; and in their tender years

Children need love before all other things,
Were it no more than some dumb creature's love,
Ay, before Christianity itself;
Trust me, there's ever time enough for that;
And if the maid but grew before your eyes
Healthy and good, then in the eyes of God
She still remained as precious as before.
And was not Christianity itself
Built up in Jewry?—it hath vexed me oft,
And cost me many a bitter bitter tear
That Christians should so utterly forget
Their own Redeemer was himself a Jew.

NATHAN.

Good brother, you must be my advocate
When hatred and hypocrisy are roused
To hunt me down for such an act as mine;
Ah, such an act! You, brother, you alone
Shall know the facts; but they must die with you;
I've ne'er been tempted by a vain desire
To tell them to another man; to you,
And to your simple piety alone,
I tell them now, since none but such as you
Can rightly measure or can comprehend
What sort of deeds a man who loves his God
Can bring himself to do.

LAY BROTHER.

You're deeply moved,
Ay, and your eyes are running o'er with tears!

NATHAN.

You brought the infant to me at Darún;
But then you could not know that, just before,
The Christians had slaughtered every Jew
Who dwelt in Gath[1]—ay, massacred them all,
Sparing nor sex nor age—nor knew you then
That my poor wife and seven hopeful sons,
Whom I had sent for safety, as I thought,
To a dear brother's house, were burnt alive
Within its walls.

LAY BROTHER.

Oh, great and righteous God!

NATHAN.

Just as you came I'd lain three days and nights
In dust and ashes bowed before the Lord;
I raved—I writhed—I wrangled with my God;
I wept, I cursed myself and all mankind,
And swore eternal and undying hate
To Christendom entire.

LAY BROTHER.

I marvel not.

NATHAN.

But reason gradually came again,
And said with gentle voice: 'God surely is,
And such was His inscrutable decree;
Now practise that which thou hast known so long,

[1]See Note 49.

To practise which is surely no more hard
Than 'tis to grasp it, if thou only wilt;
Stand up!'—I stood, and called to God: 'I will,
If Thou but help my will.'—You lighted then
From off your horse, and handed me the child
Wrapped in your mantle. What you said to me,
What I replied, I have forgotten now;
This much alone I know—I took the babe,
I bore it to my couch—I kissed its cheek;
And then I fell upon my bended knees,
And, sobbing, cried aloud: 'My God, of seven,
Here's one restored already!'

LAY BROTHER.

Nathan, sure
You are a Christian, by Heaven you are,
None better ever breathed!

NATHAN.

Alack, alack!
That which makes me a Christian in your eyes
Makes you a Jew in mine—enough, enough;
Let us no longer but unman ourselves;
We now must act—and though a seven-fold love
Has knit my heart to this one stranger maid,
Although the very thought is death to me
That I may lose once more my seven sons
In losing her, yet, if it please the Lord
To claim her at my hands, I must obey.

LAY BROTHER.

'Tis even so—it was my very wish

To breathe such counsel, but 'tis needless now;
Your own good genius hath inspired the thought.

NATHAN.

Ay, but I will not lightly let her go
To the first casual claimant.

LAY BROTHER.

Surely not.

NATHAN.

Who hath not greater rights to her than I
Must at the least have prior ones.

LAY BROTHER.

He must.

NATHAN.

Derived from nature and from kinship.

LAY BROTHER.

Ay,
Such is my thought.

NATHAN.

If you will name a man
Who by relationship can claim the maid,
As uncle, brother, cousin—what you will—
I'll ne'er resist his claim. She's formed to be
The ornament of any house or creed.
I would you knew more of your Christian knight,
And of his race, than I could ever glean.

LAY BROTHER.

Good Nathan, that is hardly to be thought,

For you've already heard I served the knight
But all too brief a space.

NATHAN.

Then know you not
At least the stock from which her mother came?
Methinks she was a Stauffen.

LAY BROTHER.

Possibly.
I think she was.

NATHAN.

And was her brother not
Conrad von Stauffen, and a Templar Knight?

LAY BROTHER.

Unless I err, he was. But wait a bit,
I think I still possess a little book
Of the late knight my master, which I plucked
From out his bosom, as we buried him
In front of Ascalon.

NATHAN.

What sort of book?

LAY BROTHER.

A book containing prayers—what we call
A breviary, in fact; and that, methought,
A Christian man might find a useful thing,
Though not myself, indeed, since as for me,
I cannot even read.

NATHAN.

Say on, say on!

LAY BROTHER.

Well, on the fly-leaf of this little book,
And also at the end, as I've been told,
There is a record in my master's hand
Of all his relatives, and of his wife's.

NATHAN.

The very thing! Run, run, and bring the book,
I'll pay you for it with its weight in gold,
Besides a thousand thanks—Oh, fetch it quick!

LAY BROTHER.

Gladly; but what my master wrote in it
Is Arabic.

NATHAN.

It matters not—quick—bring it here.
(*The* LAY BROTHER *goes.*)
My God! if I could only keep the maid,
And win a son-in-law like this to boot!
'Twere too much luck, I fear. Well, come what may.
But now I wonder who it can have been
Who went and whispered in the Patriarch's ear
A thing like this. Well, I must not forget
To find this out. I wonder if it was
Our precious Daya.

SCENE VIII.—DAYA *and* NATHAN.

DAYA (*in haste and agitation*).

Oh, Nathan, Nathan, only think!

NATHAN.

Think what?

DAYA.

The poor, dear child was fairly stunned by it;
They've sent——

NATHAN.

The Patriarch?

DAYA.

No, the Sultan's sister,
The Princess Sittah——

NATHAN.

Not the Patriarch?

DAYA.

No; Sittah, don't you hear? The Princess Sittah
Hath sent and bade her to be brought to her.

NATHAN.

Hath sent for Recha!—Sittah sent for her!
Well, if it's Sittah who has sent for her,
And not the Patriarch——

DAYA.

Why harp on *him?*

NATHAN.

Then you have had no word from him of late;
Nor whispered anything into his ear?

DAYA.

Who? I? To *him?*

NATHAN.

Where are the messengers?

DAYA.

They stand without.

NATHAN.

Well, for precaution's sake
I'll speak with them myself. I only trust
The Patriarch is not behind it all. (*He goes.*)

DAYA.

And I am anxious on another score.
Ay, sure a girl that is supposed to be
The only child of such a wealthy Jew
Were no bad catch for any Mussulman.
The Templar's chance is gone, unless indeed
I venture now upon the second step,
And tell her plainly what she really is.
Courage! for this I straightway will employ
The very first occasion I may find
To get her by herself; and that will be
Now as I go along with her to Court.
At least a slight preliminary hint
Can do no harm. Ay, ay, 'tis now or ne'er.

ACT V.

SCENE I.—*A Chamber in the Palace of the Sultan, the same wherein the treasure had been piled, as in the Third Scene of the Fourth Act. The bags of gold still there.*

SALADIN, *and presently some of his Mamelukes.*

SALADIN (*entering*).

The gold still here!—and no one seems to know
Where to find out the Dervish—it is like
He's lighted somewhere at his darling chess,
Which sometime makes him e'en forget *himself*,
Then why not also me—patience!
(*To a Mameluke who enters.*)
What now?

MAMELUKE.

Sultan, good news at last—joy, Sultan, joy!
The caravan from Cairo hath arrived,
And safely brought you from the teeming Nile
Your seven years' tribute.

SALADIN.

Bravo, Ibrahim!
You are in sooth a harbinger of good;
Ha! safely come at last!—now take my thanks
For your glad tidings.

MAMELUKE (*expectantly, to himself*).

Well, I wish he'd pay.

SALADIN.

What do you wait for?—go.

MAMELUKE.

What!—nothing else
Unto the welcome messenger?

SALADIN.

What else?

MAMELUKE.

The harbinger of tidings such as that
Looks for a courier's largesse—otherwise
I'm like to be the first whom Saladin
Has e'er fobbed off with empty thanks alone;
Something to boast of truly!—ay, the first,
The very first with whom he ever played
The niggard's part.

SALADIN (*pointing to the heaps of gold*).

Well, take a bag from there.

MAMELUKE.

No, no—not now—not if you offered me
The whole of them.

SALADIN.

Would you defy me thus?
Come, then, take two—still obstinate!—He goes,
Surpassing me in generosity!
To him it must be harder to refuse

Than 'tis to me to give. What can it be
That makes me now, so near my closing scene,
Suddenly wish to be an altered man?[1]
Should Saladin not die as Saladin,
Then he should ne'er have lived as Saladin

A SECOND MAMELUKE.

Ho, Sultan!

SALADIN.

If you've come to tell the news——

SECOND MAMELUKE.

That the Egyptian convoy hath arrived.

SALADIN.

I know't already.

SECOND MAMELUKE.

Then I've come too late!

SALADIN.

Why say too late? You'll take a bag or two
For your good will.

SECOND MAMELUKE.

Well, two and one make three.

SALADIN.

You reckon nimbly—help yourself to three.

SECOND MAMELUKE.

Another messenger comes hard behind;
That is, if he is able.

[1]See Note 50.

SALADIN.

Pray explain.

SECOND MAMELUKE.

Well, he most probably has broke his neck;
For when the three of us were well assured
The convoy had arrived, we dashed at once
To bring the news to you—the foremost horse
Stumbled and fell, and so I got the lead,
And kept it too, until we reached the town,
Where Ibrahim, sly rogue, had better skill
Among the alleys.

SALADIN.

Oh, but I'm concerned
For him who fell! ride quick and learn his case.

SECOND MAMELUKE.

Ay, that I'll gladly do; and if he lives
I'll give him half of these three bags of gold.
(*He goes.*)

SALADIN.

See, there's a noble fellow if you like!
Who else can boast of Mamelukes like these?
And may I not be suffered to suppose
That my example helped to form them thus?
Then out upon the thought that at the last
I should unteach the lessons that I gave!

A THIRD MAMELUKE.

Sultan, what ho!

SALADIN.

Are you the one who fell?

THIRD MAMELUKE.

No, Sultan, no; I come but to announce
That Emir Mansor, he who brought the gold,
Has just alighted.

SALADIN.

Bring him quickly here;
Ha! here he is himself.

SCENE II.—EMIR MANSOR *and* SALADIN.

SALADIN.

Welcome, brave Emir! So you're come at last,
Oh, Mansor, Mansor, I have looked for you
These many weary days!

MANSOR.

This missive, sire,
Will tell you of the tumult in Thebais
Which Abdul Kasim had perforce to quell
Before we dared to start the caravan;
But since we started I have urged it on
As much as might be.

SALADIN.

I believe you well.
And now, good Mansor, if you do not grudge

This added labor, take without delay
Fresh guards for the protection of the train,
And hold you ready for a further march,
Since you must bear the bulk of all this gold
Unto my father on Mount Lebanon.

MANSOR.

Most gladly, Sultan.

SALADIN.

And look well you take
Sufficient escort, for on Lebanon
Things are no longer safe. You've doubtless heard
The Templars now are on the move again;
So be upon your guard. Where halts the train?
I fain would see it and myself dispose
Its due equipment.
(*To a slave.*)
Ho, you fellow there,
Say to my sister I'll be with her soon.

SCENE III.—*The palm grove before* NATHAN'S *house.*

TEMPLAR (*alone*).

I'll ne'er again put foot within his doors;[1]
He's certain presently to show himself.
Once on a time they yearned to see me come,

[1]See Note 51.

And now 'tis like enough to come to this
That he will bid me cease to haunt his house.
Oh, I'm provoked with him—yet wherefore so?—
Why all this bitterness against a Jew?
So far at least he has refused me nought,
And Saladin himself has now engaged
To work upon him—Is it possible
The Christian's more inveterate in me
Than is in him the Jew?—ay, who can tell?—
Else why should I so bitterly resent
The trivial larceny he took such pains
To practise on the Christians? And yet
'Twas no such trivial larceny to take
A thing like that!—And who can claim her now?
She's ne'er the chattel of the nameless hind
Who cast the shapeless block on life's bleak shore
And straightway vanished. Rather is she his,
The craftsman's who in that poor derelict
Conceived and fashioned such a peerless thing.
Ay, Recha's real father is the Jew,
Spite of the Christian who gendered her;
The Jew alone. For if she were no more
Than e'er another comely Christian maid,
Without the added charm of all the gifts
Which only such a Jew could give to her,
Say, oh my heart, could she have witched me thus?
Ah no, in sooth! Her sweetest smile were then
Nought but a winsome movement of the lips;
While that which raised it never could explain

The glamor which it sheds on all her face.
Oft have I witnessed smiles as sweet as hers
Lavished on folly, raillery, or jests,
On fulsome suitors, or on flattering fools,
And did they ravish me, or make me yearn
To flutter in their sunshine all my days?
And yet I harbor wrath against the man
Whose hand alone hath made her what she is!
How's this? And have I merited the scorn
With which I was dismissed by Saladin?[1]
Whether I did or no, 'twas bad enough
That he should think I did; and oh, how small,
How despicable too I must have seemed
In eyes like his—and all about a girl!
Curd, Curd! this must not be—control thyself.
And what if Daya merely chose to prate
Of matters which she ne'er could prove? But see,
See where he comes at last—and who is yon
With whom he's plunged in talk? I do believe
It is my friend the monk! Why then, for sure,
He now knows all, and they've betrayed him now
Unto the Patriarch. Well, here's a coil!
See what my blundering has brought about.
To think that one stray spark of passion's fire
Should set the brain of man in such a blaze!
Now must I swift decide upon my course;
But meanwhile let me wait aside a space,
Perhaps the monk may leave him presently.

[1]See Note 52.

SCENE IV.—NATHAN *and the* LAY BROTHER.

NATHAN.

Once more, good brother, take my heartfelt thanks.

LAY BROTHER.

And you the same from me.

NATHAN.

Why thanks from you?
For my sheer wilfulness to force on you
That which you did not want? But you yourself
Were wilful too. You did not choose to be
By force made richer than I am myself.

LAY BROTHER.

In any case the book was none of mine;
It is the daughter's property; nay, more,
'Tis all the patrimony that she has,
Unless I count yourself. God only grant
You never may have reason to repent
All that you've done for her.

NATHAN.

Repent, indeed!
That I can never do—be sure of that.

LAY BROTHER.

But for your Templars and your Patriarchs.

NATHAN.

Not any harm that they could do to me
Could ever make me rue a single act

That I have done—and this the least of all.
And, after all, are you so very sure
It is a Templar who is hounding on
This Patriarch of yours?

LAY BROTHER.

I think it must.
A Templar spoke with him not long ago;
And all I've heard corroborates the thing.

NATHAN.

And yet at present there is only one
In all Jerusalem; and him I know;
Nay more, he is a special friend of mine,
A young, a noble, honorable man.

LAY BROTHER.

Just so—the very same—but what one is,
And what the world compels one oft to be,
Don't always correspond.

NATHAN.

Alas, 'tis true.
Then be my enemy whoe'er he may,
E'en let him do his best or do his worst,
With your book, brother, I defy them all,
I'm going with it to the Sultan now.

LAY BROTHER.

God prosper you; and now I'll take my leave.

NATHAN.

And yet you have not even seen her yet!

Come soon, come oft. If but the Patriarch
This day discovers nought! Yet after all
You now may tell him whatsoe'er you please.

LAY BROTHER.

Not I—farewell.

NATHAN.

Well, brother, think of us.
(LAY BROTHER *goes.*)
My God, I now would thank Thee on my knees!
To think the tangled skein, whose stubborn knots
Oft caused me gnawing apprehension, now
Unravels of itself! Oh, God, what joy
To think that now I've nothing to conceal,
And now can walk amid my fellow-men
As freely as I've done in sight of Thee,
Who dost not always judge us by our acts,
Acts, oh, so oftentimes not all our own!

SCENE V.—NATHAN *and the* TEMPLAR, *who advances from a retired spot.*

TEMPLAR.

Hold, Nathan, hold—take me along with you.

NATHAN.

What, you, Sir Knight? How is it that you failed
To meet me at the Sultan's?

TEMPLAR.

It would seem
We missed each other—be not vexed for that.

NATHAN.

Not I, but Saladin may chafe at it.

TEMPLAR.

When I came there, you had but just withdrawn.

NATHAN.

So you had speech with him? Then all is well?

TEMPLAR.

Ay, but he wants to see us face to face
Together there.

NATHAN.

'Tis all the better—come;
E'en now I was about to go to him.

TEMPLAR.

I fain would ask you, Nathan, who was he
Who left you even now.

NATHAN.

How? don't you know?

TEMPLAR.

It surely was the monk, the worthy soul
Who acts as lurcher to the Patriarch.

NATHAN.

Maybe—at all events the honest man
Is at the Patriarch's beck.

TEMPLAR.

'Tis no bad thought
To send Simplicity to clear the way
For Knavery.

NATHAN.

Ay, if your simpleton
Be simple only, and not honest too.

TEMPLAR.

No Patriarch ever trusts an honest fool.

NATHAN.

I'll answer for the monk—he's not the man
Would help the Patriarch to carry out
A knavish scheme.

TEMPLAR.

So he gives out at least.
But has he ne'er said aught to you of me?

NATHAN.

Of you? no, nought of you—the worthy man
Scarce knows your name.

TEMPLAR.

I hardly think he does.

NATHAN.

Well, of a certain Templar, I confess
He said to me——

TEMPLAR.

What said he?

NATHAN.

What he said
Proves absolutely that he meant not you.

TEMPLAR.

Who knows? Come, tell me what he said.

NATHAN.

He said
A certain Templar had preferred a charge
Against me to that Patriarch of his.

TEMPLAR.

A charge 'gainst you, forsooth! Well, by his leave,
That is a fiction. I am not a man
Who would be likely to disown my acts,
And what I did, I did; nor am I one
Who would maintain that all his acts are right.
Why should a single error make me blush?
And am I not resolved to do my best
Now to retrieve it; and do I not know
How far this may be done? Now, Nathan, hear,
I'm your lay brother's Templar, sure enough,
Who laid the charge against you. All the same,
You know what maddened me against you then,
What caused my blood to boil in every vein.
Fool that I was, I needs must throw myself
Body and soul into your arms. You know
How you received my suit—how cold you were,
How lukewarm, rather, which is worse than cold;

How cautiously you strove to stave me off;
With what irrelevant and air-drawn pleas
You made believe to answer to my prayer;
Scarce can I bear to think upon it now
And yet be calm. Now, Nathan, mark me well,
While in this ferment, comes me Daya next,
And slips into my ear her secret news,
Which seemed to furnish all at once the key
To your mysterious conduct.

NATHAN.

How was that?

TEMPLAR.

I'll tell you presently.—I then made sure
You'd ne'er give up to any Christian
A being whom you once had won like this
From Christian hands, and so I then resolved
As briefly and as kindly as I might
To put you out of pain.

NATHAN.

Your brevity
Was plain enough, but yet I fail to see
The kindness of your act.

TEMPLAR.

I freely own
I acted madly. You had done no wrong;
That crack-brained Daya knew not what she said;
She owes some grudge to you, and only sought
By this to plunge you in some evil snare,

Yet, for all that, I acted like a fool,
For ever rashly rushing to extremes,
Too passive now, now too impetuous;
I crave your pardon, Nathan.

NATHAN.

It is yours.

TEMPLAR.

I told the Patriarch, but I named you not;
That is a fiction, as I said but now;
I only put the case in general terms,
That I might gather what he thought of it;
That, too, had better have been left undone,
For even then I knew the Patriarch
Was but a cogging knave. Then why, you'll say,
Why could I not have spoken to yourself;
Why make the hapless girl incur the risk
To lose a father such as you? Well, well,
The knavish scheming of the Patriarch,
Ever consistent in his roguery,
Suddenly brought me to myself again;
And even if he knew your name, what then;
He only could presume to seize the girl
If she were claimed by no one but yourself;
He dare not hale her to a nunnery
Save from *your* house—then give the maid to *me;*
Give her to me—then let the Patriarch come;
He'll hardly dare to drag my wife from me;
Give her at once, be she your child or not,

Be she a Jewess or a Christian,
Or of no creed at all—it matters not;
I'll never never ask you what she is;
To me 'tis all the same.

NATHAN.

Do you suppose
That I have any need to hide the truth?

TEMPLAR.

Let that be as it may.

NATHAN.

I've ne'er denied
To you, or any who could claim to know,
That she's a Christian, and nought to me
But my adopted child. Why, then, you'll ask,
Why have I never said as much to her?
But that's a point I need not to unfold
Save unto her.

TEMPLAR.

Not even unto her
Need you unfold it—let her look on you
With the same eyes as she has ever done;
Spare her the revelation—you alone
Possess her now, and can dispose of her;
Then give her to me, Nathan, I entreat;
'Tis I alone who, for the second time,
Can save her for you, and who'll do it too.

NATHAN.

It was so once; but 'tis no longer so;
You come too late.

TEMPLAR.

How so? oh, how too late?

NATHAN.

Thanks to the Patriarch.

TEMPLAR.

Thanks to *him!* for what?
Was it *his* purpose e'er to earn our thanks?
Why thanks to him, forsooth?

NATHAN.

That now we know
Who are her kindred—to whose hands she now
May safely be surrendered.

TEMPLAR.

Nay, for that
Let him be thankful to the Patriarch
Who has more cause than I![1]

NATHAN.

Yet at the hands
Of these her kindred you must seek her now,
And not at mine.

TEMPLAR.

Poor Recha! all things seem
To jump together only to your hurt;
That which to any other orphan child
Had been a priceless blessing, is to you
A sheer calamity. But, Nathan, say,
Where are these precious new-found kinsfolk?

[1]See Note 53.

NATHAN.

Where?

TEMPLAR.

And what are they?

NATHAN.

Well, as to what they are,
A brother in especial has been found,
To whom you must address your suit for her.

TEMPLAR.

A brother, say you? Well, and what is he,
A soldier or a priest? Oh, tell me quick
What I may hope from him.

NATHAN.

I rather think
That he is neither—or is both in one—
I scarcely know him yet.

TEMPLAR.

What more of him?

NATHAN.

I hear he is an honest man, with whom
Our Recha will do well.

TEMPLAR.

A Christian too?
Nathan, at times you fairly puzzle me;
Be not offended, but you well may think
With Christians she must play the Christian,
And when she shall have played it long enough,

She'll end at last by being one in fact;
And then the tares will choke the precious wheat
Sown in her soul by you; and yet you seem
Quite unconcerned for that, and calmly say
She's sure to prosper 'neath her brother's care!

NATHAN.

Well, so I think at least, and so I hope;
If she should lack for aught beneath his care,
She'll still have you and me to think of her.

TEMPLAR.

What can she ever chance to lack with him?
The loving brother surely will provide
The darling sister with a goodly store
Of food and raiment, dainty things, and gauds;
And what more could she want, unless it be
A man to wed her? Well, well, even that
The loving brother in his own good time
Will surely find her, if he's to be found;
And then, the better Christian he is,
The better chance for him. Alack, my friend,
'Tis sad you've reared an angel such as this
To be preverted thus by other hands!

NATHAN.

Why these regrets? Our angel, be assured,
Will ever prove right worthy of our love.[1]

TEMPLAR.

Speak not thus lightly of my love for her;

[1]See Note 54.

It ne'er can brook partition such as this
With e'er another—no, not e'en in name.
But tell me, has she any inkling yet
Of what awaits her?

NATHAN.

Possibly she has;
But whence the inkling came I cannot tell.

TEMPLAR.

Nay, nay, this is too much—she shall—she must
Learn first from me the tidings of her lot.
My resolution ne'er to see her more
Till I could call her mine, now melts away;
I'll haste me now——

NATHAN.

Haste whither?

TEMPLAR.

Unto her;
To see if haply in her maiden soul
There may be found sufficient man-like stuff
To make her yet adopt the sole resolve
That's worthy of her.

NATHAN.

What is that?

TEMPLAR.

'Tis this;
To snap her fingers at the pair of you;
You and her brother.

NATHAN.

And?

TEMPLAR.

To follow me;
E'en if in doing so she had to wed
A Moslem.

NATHAN.

Stay, she is no longer there;
She's now with Sittah, or with Saladin.

TEMPLAR.

Since when? and why?

NATHAN.

And if you'd like to meet
The brother there with them, then come with me.

TEMPLAR.

The brother? whose? Sittah's, or Recha's, which?

NATHAN.

Possibly both—but come, I pray you come.
(*He leads him away.*)

SCENE VI.—*Sittah's Boudoir.* SITTAH *and* RECHA *in conversation.*

SITTAH.

Oh, what delight you give me, darling child!
But be not agitated—be not shy;
Be gay and prattle freely—be at ease.

RECHA.

Princess——

SITTAH.

Not Princess—call me Sittah, dear;
Your friend, your sister, mother—what you will.
I well might be the last, you are so young,
And yet so wise—and good as you are wise;
You seem to know all things, and to have read
All that has e'er been writ.

RECHA.

Who? *I* indeed!
You surely mock your little silly friend;
I scarce can read.

SITTAH.

Nay, that's a little fib.

RECHA.

Well, I can spell out what my father pens;
At least a little—but I thought you spoke
Of real books.

SITTAH.

Yes, dear, I spoke of books.

RECHA.

Well, I can scarcely read a book at all.

SITTAH.

What?—are you serious?

RECHA.

Quite—my father says
Frigid book-learning's but a sorry thing,
Whose lifeless symbols speak not to the heart.

SITTAH.

Ha! saith he so? Methinks he's not far wrong.
How came you, then, to learn the many things
You seem to know?

RECHA.

I learnt them from his lips;
And I could almost tell you even now
Where, how, and why he mostly taught me them.

SITTAH.

Things taught like this dwell longest in the mind,
For then the whole soul learns.

RECHA.

And as for books,
I judge you too have read but few or none.

SITTAH.

How so? I cannot boast me of my lore,
But state your grounds—and boldly—come, your grounds.

RECHA.

Because you are so natural, so fresh,
So free from artifice,—so like yourself.

SITTAH.

And what of that?

RECHA.

My father says that books
Too seldom leave us so.

SITTAH.

Your father seems
To be a wondrous man.

RECHA.

Ay, that he is.

SITTAH.

How close he ever shoots unto the mark!

RECHA.

He does—and then to think——

SITTAH.

What ails you, dear?

RECHA.

To think that I must lose——

SITTAH.

My God, you weep!

RECHA.

That I must lose—ay, it must out, or else

My heart would burst—to think that I must lose
A father such as that!
(*She falls, sobbing, at the feet of* SITTAH.)

SITTAH.

What! lose him! how?
Be calm—you shall not lose him—rise, my child.

RECHA.

Then not in vain you'll have become to me
A sister and a friend.

SITTAH.

Be sure I'm both.
But rise, my child, or I must call for help.

RECHA (*controlling herself, and rising*).

Forgive me! anguish caused me to forget
With whom I speak—oh no, despairing tears
Are not required to move a Sittah's heart;
Calm reason is enough for souls like hers;
With Sittah reason's cause is sure to win.

SITTAH.

Well, tell your tale.

RECHA.

My sister and my friend,
Oh, never never let them force on me
Another father—oh, permit it not!

SITTAH.

What! force another father upon you!
Who can do that, or wish to do it, dear?

RECHA.

Who? Why my own good wicked Daya can;
Ay, she can wish it and can do it too;
You know her not—at once so good and bad;
May God forgive her, and reward her too;
She's been so kind to me, and yet she's been
Oh, so unkind as well!

SITTAH.

Unkind to *you*?
Then of a truth there's little good in her.

RECHA.

Oh yes, there is, and much.

SITTAH.

Who is she, then?

RECHA.

A Christian, who when I was but a babe
Was nurse to me, and oh, you cannot think
How tenderly she filled a mother's place,
And caused me to forget my orphan state!
May God requite her! Yet with all her love,
She oft has tortured me.

SITTAH.

But how and why?

RECHA.

The dear good woman, I must tell you plain,
Is one of those good simple Christian souls

Who from sheer love must torture those they love;
One of those kindly fanatics who think
They only know the strait and narrow way,
The one true way to God.

SITTAH.

Ah, now I see.

RECHA.

Who feel impelled to force upon that way
All who may chance to tread another track;
And scarce could they do else, for if 'tis true
That *their* way only leads to lasting bliss,
How could they calmly see their friends pursue
Another path which, as they are convinced,
Can only lead us to eternal woe?
Else it were possible to love and hate
The self-same person at the self-same time.
No, 'tis not that which now at last has roused
These loud complaints against her. All her sighs,
Her warnings, her entreaties, and her threats,
I could have borne with patience to the end;
These only led me ever unto thoughts
Which were both good and profitable too;
And it is flattering to us to feel
That any fellow-creature loves us so
As to be tortured by the very thought
Of losing us for all eternity.

SITTAH.

Ay, that is true.

RECHA.

But now she's gone too far;
Nothing can palliate her last offence;
All patience, all reflection, fail me now;
'Tis past all bearing!

SITTAH.

What was this offence?

RECHA.

Well, a disclosure she professed to make
This very day.

SITTAH.

That's strange—this very day!

RECHA.

On our way hither, just as we approached
A ruined Christian temple, all at once
She stopped, and seemed to struggle with herself;
With tearful eyes she first looked up to heaven,
And then she gazed on me; at last she said—
Come, let us take the path which leads direct
Through this old ruined fane; with that she went;
I followed, and I shuddered as I viewed
The mouldering relics which bestrewed the spot;
Again she halted, and I stood with her
Hard by a crumbling altar's sunken steps;
Then judge of my surprise when all at once,

Wringing her hands, and shedding scalding tears,
She fell before my feet.

SITTAH.

My precious child!

RECHA.

And by the holy Virgin, who of yore
Had heard so many a prayer before that shrine,
And there had wrought so many a miracle,
With looks of deepest sympathy and love,
She prayed me to have pity on myself;
Or at the least to pardon her if now
She told me of her church's claims on me.

SITTAH (*to herself*).

Alas, I feared as much!

RECHA.

She said I was
Of Christian blood, had duly been baptised,
And was no child of Nathan's. Ay, she said
Nathan was *not* my father—oh, my God,
To think he is not that!—ah, Sittah, now
I cast me once more prostrate at your feet!

SITTAH.

Nay, Recha, rise—see there, my brother comes!

SCENE VII.—SALADIN *and the Preceding.*

SALADIN.

Sittah, what's this?

SITTAH.

She seems beside herself!

SALADIN.

Who is she?

SITTAH.

Sure, you know.

SALADIN.

What, Nathan's child?
What ails her?

SITTAH.

Child, arise, 'tis Saladin.

RECHA (*who, still kneeling and with bowed head, has crept to the Sultan's feet*).

No, I will not arise—I ne'er will look
Upon the Sultan's face, or contemplate
The image of eternal rectitude
And goodness in his eyes and on his front,
Until he promise first——

SITTAH.

Arise, arise!

RECHA.

Not till he promise——

SALADIN.

Well, I promise it,
Whate'er it be.

RECHA.

'Tis neither more nor less
Than that he'll let my father bide with me,
And me with him. As yet I do not know
Who else it is who possibly can wish
To fill his place—nor do I seek to know—
Are fathers haply made by blood alone?

SALADIN (*raising her*).

I see it all—who could so cruel be
To breathe the thought so rashly in your breast?
But is the thing established, fully proved?

RECHA.

It must be so indeed, for Daya says
She had it from my nurse.

SALADIN.

Your nurse, say you?

RECHA.

Who in her dying moments felt constrained
To trust the secret unto Daya's ear.

SALADIN.

Dying indeed!—perhaps delirious too.
And even were it true, still, as you've said,
Blood is not all that makes paternity;
Not even 'mid the brutes—it gives, at most,

The prior right to earn the sacred name—
So then cheer up; and if a brace of sires
Now wrangle for you, leave them in the lurch,
And take a third—take *me* to be your sire.

SITTAH.

Oh, do—oh, do!

SALADIN.

I'll prove a good one too;
A right good sire to you—or, better still,
What do you want with fathers after all?
They die so soon—best look around betimes
For one who'll match you in the race of life.
Know you none such?

SITTAH.

Oh, do not make her blush.

SALADIN.

Nay, it was my intention to do that;
Blushes make even homely features fair,
How could they fail to make the fair more fair?
I've bid your father Nathan join us here,
And with him I have bid another come,—
With Sittah's kind permission—can you guess
Who that may be?

SITTAH.

Oh, brother!

SALADIN.

When he comes,
Blush before *him*, dear maiden, if you like.

RECHA.

Blush!—before whom?

SALADIN.

You little hyprocite!
Turn pale, then, if you like—just as you please,
And as you can.
(*A female slave enters and approaches* SITTAH.)
What,—come they even now?

SITTAH.

'Tis they, my brother—bid them come within.

LAST SCENE.—NATHAN, *the* TEMPLAR, *and the Preceding.*

SALADIN.

Welcome, my worthy friends!—and first of all,
Let me now tell you, Nathan, you can send
As soon as e'er you please to fetch your gold.

NATHAN.

What mean you, Sultan?

SALADIN.

That 'tis now *my* turn
To be of use to *you*.

NATHAN.

What mean you, sire?

SALADIN.

The caravan is come, and now again
I'm richer than I've been this many a day;
So tell me what you need; to undertake
Some right grand stroke of trade; for, like
ourselves,
You merchant folk can never have too much
Of ready cash.

NATHAN.

But wherefore mention first
A trifle such as this? I yonder see
An eye in tears, which it concerns me more,
Far more, to dry. My Recha, why these tears?
What ails you—are you not my daughter still?

RECHA.

My father——

NATHAN.

'Tis enough—we understand—
Be cheerful, and be calm. Oh, may your heart
Be still your own, and may no other loss
Threaten its peace!—your father still remains
Unlost to you.

RECHA.

I fear no other loss.

TEMPLAR.

No other loss!—then, sure, I've been deceived;
What we fear not to lose we've ne'er believed
To have possessed, nor ever wished to have.

Well, be it so—Nathan, this changes all—
Sultan, 'twas at your bidding that I came;
But I've misled you—think no more of me

SALADIN.

How! so precipitate again, young man?
Must all anticipate your lightest thought,
Your every wish?

TEMPLAR.

Sultan, you've heard and seen!

SALADIN.

Ay, truly—pity you were not more sure
Of how you stood.

TEMPLAR.

Well, *now* I'm sure of it.

SALADIN.

He who presumes e'en on a worthy deed
Thereby revokes it. She whose life you saved
Does not by that become your property;
Or else the robber, whom the greed of gain
Impels into the fire, would be as much
A hero as yourself——
(*Advancing to* RECHA, *and addressing her.*)
But come, my girl,
Be not too hard with him; for were he else,
Were he less hot and hasty than he is,
Perhaps he never would have saved your life.
Then weigh the good in him against the bad;

Put him to shame—do what *he* ought to do;
Confess you love him—offer him yourself;
He dare not slight you; no, nor e'er forget
How infinitely more by such a step
You do for him than e'er he did for you;
For, after all, what *was* it that he did?
Let himself be a little smirched by smoke!
A mighty matter!—he could do no less;
Else he has nought of Assad in his soul,
And wears his mask alone and not his heart;
Come, maiden, come.
(*He seeks to lead her to the* TEMPLAR'S *side.*)

SITTAH.

Ay, go—'twere not too much
By way of gratitude for that he did;
It scarcely were enough.

NATHAN.

Hold, Saladin,
And Sittah, hold!

SALADIN.

What, you too, Nathan, now!

NATHAN.

Ay, Sultan, here I must put in a word.

SALADIN.

Well, Nathan, who denies your right to speak?
A foster-father such as you have been
Right well deserves a voice; nay, if you will,

More than we all—but let me tell you now
I know exactly how the matter stands.

NATHAN.

Not quite, methinks—I speak not of myself,
But of another, a far other man,
Who, Saladin, must be consulted first.

SALADIN.

And who is he?

NATHAN.

Her brother.

SALADIN.

Recha's?

NATHAN.

Ay.

RECHA.

My brother! have I then a brother?

TEMPLAR (*starting out of a moody abstraction*).

Where,
Where is this brother? not yet here?—'twas said
That I should meet him here.

NATHAN.

And so you shall.

TEMPLAR (*bitterly*).

He's fixed a father on her—can he not
Fish up a brother too?

SALADIN.

This is too much!
A thought so base as this could ne'er have passed
My Assad's lips—it does you credit, sir.

NATHAN.

Forgive him, Sultan, as I gladly do;
Who knows what haply might have been our thought
If tried like him, and at an age like his?
(*To the* TEMPLAR, *kindly.*)
Sir knight, I do not blame you, for mistrust
Begets suspicion—'tis a pity now
You did not plainly tell me at the first
Your real name.

TEMPLAR.

How!

NATHAN.

Stauffen's not your name.

TEMPLAR.

What is it, then?

NATHAN.

Not Curd von Stauffen, sir.

TEMPLAR.

Then what's my name?

NATHAN.

Von Filneck is your name;
Leo von Filneck.

TEMPLAR.

How is that?

NATHAN.

You start?

TEMPLAR.

I may well start—who says so?

NATHAN.

I myself;
And I can tell you more—but do not think
I tax you with untruth—it well might be
That either name might fit you equally.

TEMPLAR.

'Twas my own thought—God bade him utter it!

NATHAN.

Ay, for your mother was a Stauffen, sir;
Her brother, that's your uncle, brought you up;
Your parents left you in his German home
When, driven by the rigorous climate thence,
Themselves came back again to Palestine.
His name was Curd von Stauffen, and belike
In childhood he may have adopted you.
Now tell me when it was you landed here
Along with him; and haply lives he still?

TEMPLAR.

What shall I say? Oh, Nathan, sure you're right!
My uncle's dead—for me, I only came
With the last draft which sailed to reinforce

Our Order's ranks—but oh, I pray you say
What have these circumstances got to do
With Recha's new-found brother?

NATHAN.

Well, your sire——

TEMPLAR.

What!—did you know *him* too?

NATHAN.

He was my friend.

TEMPLAR.

Your friend!—is't possible?

NATHAN.

He called himself
Von Filneck—Wolf von Filneck—yet by race
He was no German.

TEMPLAR.

Know you that as well?

NATHAN.

He was but wedded to a German wife,
And went with her for but a little space
To Germany.

TEMPLAR.

Enough—come, say at once,
Who is our Recha's brother?

NATHAN.

You are he!

TEMPLAR.

What!—*I* her brother!

RECHA.

He my brother—oh!

SITTAH.

Brother and sister?

SALADIN.

Is it possible?

RECHA (*making to approach the* TEMPLAR).
Ah, brother!

TEMPLAR (*stepping back*).

I your brother?

RECHA (*stopping, and turning to* NATHAN).

Nay, alas,
It cannot be—his heart knows nought of it!
My God, we're but deceivers!

SALADIN.

How is this?
You a deceiver!—never think it, girl.
(*To the* TEMPLAR.)
You're the deceiver!—everything in you
Seems simulated—face, and voice, and gait—
Nothing is yours—and now you will not own
A sister such as this!—hence from my sight!

TEMPLAR (*approaching him with humility*).

Sultan, misconstrue not my sheer surprise;
Misjudge not either Assad or myself

At such a moment—sure, you never saw
Your Assad in so strange a plight as this.
(*Turning to* NATHAN.)
Nathan, you rob me, but enrich me too;
Both in full measure—but you give me more,
Far more than that which you have ta'en away;
(*Clasping* RECHA *in his arms.*)
My sister, oh my sister!

NATHAN.

Call her now
Blanda von Filneck.

TEMPLAR.

Blanda, must it be?
And Recha now no more?—you cast her off;
And call her by her Frankish name once more;
And all for me—oh, Nathan, wherefore thus
Make *her* a sufferer on my account?

NATHAN.

What mean you?—you are *both* my chidren now;
For sure my daughter's brother is my child
As well as she, as soon as e'er he will.
(*While he yields himself to their embraces,* SALADIN *approaches his sister with an expression of astonishment and perplexity.*)

SALADIN.

What think you, Sittah?

SITTAH.

'Tis a moving scene.

SALADIN.

And as for me, I almost now recoil
From telling you a thing more moving still,
For which you must prepare as best you may.

SITTAH.

Oh, what is this?

SALADIN.

Nathan, a word with you.

(*While* SALADIN *and* NATHAN *speak together in suppressed tones,* SITTAH *approaches the* TEMPLAR *and* RECHA *with expressions of sympathy and tenderness.*)

You said her father was no German born;
Know you, then, what he was, and whence he came?

NATHAN.

That he himself would ne'er confide to me;
He never breathed a word upon the point.

SALADIN.

Was he a Frank at all—a western man?

NATHAN.

He ever freely owned he was not that;
His speech was Persian.

SALADIN.

Persian, do you say?
What more do I require?—'twas he, 'twas he!

NATHAN.

Whom mean you?

SALADIN.

'Tis my brother whom I mean;
'Twas he for sure. My Assad was the man!

NATHAN.

Well, since you thus have hit on it yourself,
Behold its confirmation in this book!
(*Handing him the* LAY BROTHER'S *breviary.*)

SALADIN (*eagerly opening it*).

Ah! 'tis his hand—that, too, I recognize!

NATHAN.

As yet they know it not—it rests with you,
With you alone, to tell them all the truth.

SALADIN (*while examining the volume*).

What! think you, Nathan, I shall fail to claim
My brother's children—fail to claim my niece;
My nephew too? What, fail to claim my own!
Think you I'm like to hand them o'er to you?
(*Aloud, to the group.*)
Ho, Sittah, they're my own—they are, they are!
They both are mine—our Assad's children both!
(*He hastens to embrace them.*)

SITTAH (*following him*).

Ay, who can doubt it? they are ours indeed!

SALADIN (*to the* TEMPLAR).

Now, stubborn boy, you're *bound* to love me—
bound!

(*To* RECHA.)

And now I am your father for a fact,
Whether you will or no!

SITTAH.

And you're my child!

SALADIN (*again to the* TEMPLAR).

My son!—my Assad!—oh, my Assad's son!

TEMPLAR.

Then am I of your blood? if that be so,
The tales with which they lulled my infancy
Were more than idle dreams!

(*He falls at* SALADIN'S *feet.*)

SALADIN (*raising him*).

Hark to the rogue!
He knew about it all along, and yet
He was within an ace of making me
His murderer,—by Heaven!—his murderer!

NOTES

NOTES BY THE TRANSLATOR

In almost every instance where the present translator has differed from previous translators in essential points of interpretation, or has characterised their versions as erroneous, he has done so on the authority of the eminent commentator DUENTZER, *or of Professor* BUCHHEIM *or of German critical scholars, resident in Germany, whom he has specially consulted in view to the attainment of strict accuracy in regard to the passages or points in question.*

NOTE 1. AUTHOR'S MOTTO ON TITLE PAGE.

Introite, nam et heic Dii sunt!
(Enter, for here too are gods.)

Professor Buchheim has called attention to the curious accident by which these words, which Lessing prefixed as a motto to this drama, were erroneously ascribed to Aulus Gellius. In point of fact, they do not occur anywhere in the works of that writer. The sentiment—expressed in Greek—is to be found in Aristotle (*De Part. An.*, 1-5); and it would seem that by a strange chance it crept, in its present Latin form, into the preface of Aulus Gellius to his *Noctes Atticae* by an apparently accidental interpolation on the part of Phil. Beroaldus in his edition of that work (Bologna, 1503). The point is more curious than important.

NOTE 2. PAGE 127.

The name Daya is an Arabic and Persian word signifying a nurse or foster-mother; equivalent to the Greek *trophos*, applied in the *Odyssey* to Euryclea, the nurse of Ulysses. The same word, under various modifications, but with the

same meaning, is current at the present day in most of the vernacular languages of India.

Note 3. Page 132.

'Twas a young Templar, who, some days before,
Spared by the clemency of Saladin,
Had been brought hither as a captive—

The word Saladin is a corruption of the Arabic Saláh-ood-Deen—or Integrity of the Faith—one of the many titles of Yussuf Ibn Ayub, the famous Sultan of Egypt and Syria, the Moslem hero of the third crusade, and the mirror of Mahomedan chivalry. According to etymology, the word Saladin ought obviously to have the stress on the second syllable; and in all probability it was originally pronounced Saládin, but with the characteristic tendency of English pronunciation to throw the stress on the early part of each word, it is now generally pronounced Sáladin.

Note 4. Page 138.

Whom would you flatter now;
The angel or yourself?

This expression on the part of Recha is explained by the supposition that she not only believed herself to be the daughter of Nathan, but also imagined that she closely resembled him in personal apparance.

Note 5. Page 139.

To me the greatest miracle is this, etc.

The passage commencing with this line and ending with the words "out of Nature's course," presents difficulty to some readers; yet, although somewhat condensed, its meaning is sufficiently plain. Nathan is endeavoring to dispel the illusion by which Recha is possessed, to the effect that her rescue from the burning house was not effected by the Templar or by any other mere human agency, but was due to the miraculous interposition of a veritable angel. In his efforts to do this he not

only points out to her that it might almost be regarded as a miracle that the Templar should have been spared by Saladin, usually so relentless to all prisoners belonging to that Order, but he also propounds a general reflection on the subject, to the following effect:—He contends that we are at all times surrounded by wondrous natural phenomena which might well be regarded as miracles but for the fact that their habitual recurrence renders us familiar with them, and causes us to cease to wonder at them. Thus, for example, such things as the daily rising and setting of the sun; the development of a seed into a tree, and the like, strictly regarded, should be held to be miraculous, and probably would be so regarded by any one observing them for the first time; but that such phenomena "by use and wont grow stale and commonplace." Were it not for this fact, he argues, these and similar occurrences would continue to be considered miraculous; and the name of miracle would not by thinking men be confined exclusively to those supposed supernatural occurrences, or suspensions of the laws of nature, which alone excite the wonder of fools and children.

Note 6. Page 140.

Or tender for his life
More than the leathern girdle of his sword,
His dagger at the most.

By the rules of their Order the Templars were not permitted to offer for their ransom anything beyond their sword-belts or their daggers; a regulation which practically amounted to the prohibition of any offer of ransom at all. Düntzer objects to this passage that the Templars did not wear leathern belts, but girdles of white linen as an emblem of their purity. Even if this be so, the objection seems unimportant.

Note 7. Page 142.

Look you,—a forehead with a certain arch.

This and the following six lines merely refer to the

casual occurrence on the Templar's face of such and such features, in which Saladin fortunately found or fancied a resemblance to his own long-lost brother, and thus led him to spare the life of the knight, whereby the latter was enabled to rescue Recha from the flames.

Nathan characterizes the countenance of the Templar as "a barbarous European face" because in that age the orientals regarded the inhabitants of Western Europe as uncivilized in comparison with themselves.

Note 8. Page 148.

Al Hafi is, strictly speaking, an Arabic adjective signifying the bare-foot, or the bare-footed one; an epithet peculiarly appropriate to a Dervish or wandering mendicant. Düntzer entirely misapprehends the meaning of the word, and, by a strange confusion, seems to connect it with the totally unrelated Arabic word *Hafiz,* which means a religionist who knows by heart the principal passages of the Koran.

Note 9. Page 153.

Al Hafi, minister of Saladin.

The word in the original, here translated *minister,* is *Defterdar*—more properly *Dufturdar*—a Persian and Arabic term meaning, primarily, a record-keeper, and, secondarily, an intendant of finance—a treasurer—from *Duftur,* a book, roll, or register.

Note 10. Page 155.

> By thousands to oppress and crush mankind,
> Rob them, destroy them, torture them, yet play
> The philanthrope to individual men.

This rendering of this passage is adopted on the authority of Professor Buchheim, although in opposition to the opinion of Düntzer. But inasmuch as the view taken of it by the latter commentator results in a greatly less effective version, the present translator feels fully warranted by the great reputation of Dr. Buchheim in preferring the interpretation here presented.

Note 11. Page 162.

Well, I'm a Templar, and a prisoner,
Taken at Tebnin.

Tebnin was a fortress in the neighborhood of Tyre, where the Templars suffered a defeat at the hands of the Saracens in the year 1187.

Note 12. Page 165.

It is intended for King Philip's hands.

The reference here is of course to Philip II. of France, commonly called Philip Augustus; but it should be observed that prior to the action figured in this play that monarch had quitted the Holy Land.

Note 13. Page 172.

As Persia, Syria, and far Cathay
Alone can furnish forth.

The word *Sina* here used in the original course means China, being drawn from an Arabic form of the name of that country. Yet a recent translator, strange to say, renders it Sinai!

Note 14. Page 173.

But then how soon
Such moments melt away!

This is merely a sneering implication on the part of the Templar that the enthusiastic gratitude of the Jew would soon evaporate.

Note 15. Page 173.

By birth a Swiss,
Who had at once the honor and the joy
Of choking in the self-same puny stream
With his Imperial Majesty himself.

In this passage the allusion is to the death of the Emperor Frederick I. of Germany, commonly called Barbarossa, who, in attempting to cross the insignificant river Calycadnus in

Pisidia, one of the ancient divisions of Asia Minor, was drowned on the 10th of June, 1190.

It should be stated, however, that according to some authorities, Barbarossa died of fever contracted from bathing in the Orontes.

Note 16. Page 176.

But now
My pawn will *fork*.

The German phrase here translated *fork*, as well as that a little lower down translated *discovered check*, are technical terms well known to chess-players; and they are here adopted on the strength of the opinion of Professor Buchheim, who cites in support of his opinion no less authority than that of the eminent chess-player Dr. Zukertort. It appears that the usual translation of *Abschach*, at line 45 of this scene, as *double check*, is erroneous and untenable; and that the phrase really means what English chess-players call *discovered check*.

Note 17. Page 178.

The *Dinar* was a small Arabian gold coin, worth about eight shillings of our money. The *Naserin*—German diminutive *Naserinchen*—was a minute coin worth about a farthing. Its name was derived from that of the Caliph Naser.

Note 18. Page 179.

Nay, nay, you've taught me better, Saladin,
The courtesy that's ever due to queens.

This is probably an illusion to the historic generosity which Saladin practised towards the sister of Saleh, son of the Sultan Noor-ood-Deen, who had been vanquished by Saladin, as well as to his well-known courtesy towards Sibylla, wife of Guy de Lusignan, Maria, spouse of Prince Balian II., and other princesses.

Note 19. Page 180.

Or did they fancy that I meant to play
With the Imaum?

This passage very certainly stands in need of elucidation. It is usually badly rendered word for word as it stands in the original: "Was it with Iman that I've played?" which affords the reader no clue to the allusion obviously intended, and indeed presents no sense at all; while it seems to assume that *Iman* was the name of some special individual. But this is scarcely translation.

The word *Iman* in the original is not a personal name at all, but is a heteroclite, if not a positively erroneous, form of *Imaum,* an Arabic word signifying the Mahomedan priest presiding in a mosque. As is well known, Mahomed, closely following the Mosaic injunction now embodied in our Second Commandment, stringently prohibited his followers not only from making any graven images, but from making anything in the likeness of any organic object whatsoever. The use of such things by devout Mahomedans was rigorously forbidden; and it may be observed that no such figures are ever to be seen in the decorations of Mahomedan churches or other buildings, or in the synagogues of the Jews. In course of time this prohibition, like many others in the Prophet's code, came to be disregarded by the great body of his lay followers; but it still continued, and perhaps still continues, to be rigidly obeyed by the Mahomedan priesthood. Hence it followed that no priest, and still less the presiding priest of a mosque, permitted himself to use chess men carved in the semblance of any special object; the pieces used by the Mahomedan priesthood being required to be absolutely plain. In the passage here under consideration Saladin is represented as endeavoring half jocularly to account for his loss of the game of chess to Sittah. Among other excuses, he seeks to throw the blame on the pieces which have been supplied to him by his attendants, which appear to have been plain ones, destitute of ornament, and he exclaims—

> Why do they ever give us this plain set
> Of formless pieces, representing nought,
> And barren of suggestion to the mind?

And then he adds, as if to account for their having done so,

and as if to accentuate the unsuitability of such pieces for his purpose—

> Or did they fancy that I meant to play
> With the Imaum?

who of course could use no other but plain pieces representing no figures. It appears to the present translator that without this explanation the meaning of this passage could not be properly apprehended.

Note 20. Page 181.

> The man who's fit to be my Sittah's mate,
> And that is Richard's brother.

It need scarcely be said that there is no historical foundation for the idea that any such a union as is here supposed was ever contemplated; it is a pure creation of the poet's.

Note 21. Page 181.

> Had his sister now
> Chanced to become our brother Melek's bride.

History records that during the negotiations which took place towards the close of the third crusade it was at one time actually proposed by Richard *Coeur de Lion* that Saladin's brother Me'lek, or more properly Malik el Adil, should become a Christian, marry Richard's sister, and be made King of Jerusalem. This project, however, as might have been expected of so extravagant a design, eventually came to nothing. The sister of Richard, whom it was proposed to give in marriage to the brother of Saladin, was Joan, widow of King William of Sicily, whom she had accompanied to Palestine in the third crusade.

Note 22. Page 183.

> I've been to Lebanon and seen our sire.

This is also a creation of the poet's. In point of fact, Saladin's father had died some years previously to the occurrences referred to or imagined in this drama.

Note 23. Page 185.

Grudge you, forsooth! when, sure, you know full well

. . . . . .

You grudge it to yourself.

In this and the following lines, constituting the first part of this scene, we find Al Hafi on the brink of betraying to Saladin the generous self-denial of Sittah, which has prompted her for long not only to forego the sums which she has at various times won at chess from her brother, while leaving him to suppose that she has received them, but also to surrender her fixed allowance and all other personal resources at her command, and to leave or place them in Al Hafi's hands, in order to relieve the struggling exchequer of the Sultan.

The Dervish is ever on the point of divulging the matter; while Sittah, from motives of honorable delicacy, is in an agony of apprehension lest he should do so, and does all in her power to prevent her brother from surprising her honorable secret. Thus she implores Al Hafi at least to *say*, that is, to pretend, that she will get the gold, and to make believe at least that she may send to fetch it; until at last, provoked by Saladin's obstinate determination to lose the game, the Dervish blurts out that the Sultan's play is on a par with his payment of his losses, both alike a sham; which shortly leads to the discovery of Sittah's generosity.

Some persons appear to have completely missed the point of some of the expressions used in this episode; as, for example, where they render line 24 of this scene, "Do say that I may send to fetch the gold," as if she really desired to get it; whereas her meaning really is that she wishes the Dervish to say *to Saladin* that she is welcome to send for it; and this merely with the view of preventing the Sultan's discovery of her secret. Also, line 42 of this scene is generally quite incorrectly rendered as "small pains, small gains"; a version which obviously loses sight of the intention of all Hafi's words, which in point of fact are meant to imply that Saladin's play is

as unreal and as much a sham as is his payment of his sister's gains.

Note 24. Page 191.

Downright embezzlement
Had been a safer thing to venture on.

It is somewhat strange that in this passage the original German word *Unterschleif*, which means *embezzlement* only, or *fraud*, should by some translators have been rendered *deficits;* a rendering not only erroneous, but involving a serious sacrifice of the sense of the passage.

Note 25. Page 209.

The knot must not look down upon the gnarl.

Here Nathan, carrying out his comparison of men with trees, compares ordinary and insignificant persons to the worthless portions of timber; the knots and gnarls which, as well as the "topmost twigs," must not presume to be arrogant, and to look down upon each other.

Note 26. Page 209.

Where has it shown itself in blacker form
Than here and now?

This entire passage is a vehement denunciation by the Templar of all bigoted and fanatical propagandism, whether on the part of Christian, Mahomedan, or Jew; and in the lines above cited he specially refers to the crusades, which expeditions Lessing had already, in his *Dramaturgie*, characterized as being, in his opinion, "the most inhuman persecutions of which Christian superstition was ever guilty."

Note 27. Page 222.

Among my patrons on the Ganges' banks
I need do neither.

Most translators render the word *Geber* in this passage as *Ghebers*, or *Guebres*, that is to say, Fire-worshippers, or followers of Zoroaster. This would seem to point to grave

misapprehension somewhere; and this for two reasons. In the first place, on the banks of the Ganges there are no Guebres, and, so far as is known, never were. In the second place, even if it be contended that poets may put Guebres where they please, on the time-honored principle that

Pictoribus atque poetis,
Quidlibet audendi semper fuit equa potestas,

yet even poets may not talk nonsense; and it would be sheer nonsense to make an orthodox Mahomedan like Al Hafi speak with affectionate veneration of *"his Guebres,"* since Guebres are, and always have been, an abomination to Mahomedans.

It might seem probable that the word originally employed by Lessing was merely the simple word *Geber,* a giver or donor; and that Al Hafi merely refers to those bounteous persons dwelling on the banks of the Ganges who would be likely to bestow alms upon him—his patrons, in short, or benefactors. It appears, however, that in all the earlier editions of this play the word used in this passage is *Gheber,* which means Guebre, and can mean nothing else; and that Lessing purposely, however erroneously, used it in ignorance of the double objection to it cited above. Nevertheless, since all the later editions of the play print the word *Geber,* it may be presumed that the original error on the part of Lessing has since been detected, and corrected by the simple omission of the letter *h* in the word; and as it seems undesirable to perpetuate an absurdity, the present translator feels fully warranted in translating the word, not as it may have appeared in early editions, but as it now stands before him, and he has therefore rendered it as *patrons.*

Some authorities, and among them is the commentator Düntzer himself, have endeavored to combat one of the objections above mentioned by maintaining that Al Hafi was himself a Guebre. This is absolutely untenable. That he was a Mahomedan is indisputable; the name is essentially that of a Mussulman; a Dervish is essentially a Mahomedan mendicant; he is attached to the court of Saladin, which no Fire-worshipper could ever be; and in the third scene of the first

act, he swears by the Prophet, which no Fire-worshipper would ever do. Finally, even were this objection successfully combated, the other, and the more important one, would still remain.

Note 28. Page 222.

And I'll provide you with a pilgrim's frock.

By a strange and unaccountable error some translators render the word here correctly translated *frock* as *staff*. The word in the original is *Delk*. Now *Delk*, or more accurately *Dalk*, is simply an Old Persian word which signifies a pilgrim's frock, and nothing else. This blunder is the more remarkable and inexcusable inasmuch as Lessing himself, in writing to his brother, thinks it worth while to emphasize the true meaning of the word.

Note 29. Page 232.

Why seek to hide
That which your fitful features speak so plain?

In this passage the Templar does not imply that Recha's looks betray love for him, as translators so generally, but erroneously, represent. He merely refers to her beauty both of form and character, which had been intimated to him in glowing terms by Nathan.

Note 30. Page 235.

How such a sudden tempest in my breast
Should be succeeded by this sudden calm.

In this passage, as well as in certain lines which follow a little farther on, the poet seems to wish to mitigate the undoubted unpleasantness of a situation where brother and sister, albeit unconscious of their relationship, occupy even temporarily the position of lovers. It will be observed that as soon as Recha has obtained her wish to see the Templar, and had thanked him for his rescue of her, her feeling towards him calms down, in a manner unaccountable even to herself, and she entertains no thought of erotic love towards him.

Note 31. Page 247.

Well then.—In hoar antiquity there dwelt
In eastern lands a man who had received
From a loved hand a ring of priceless worth.—*Sqq.*

The famous apologue of the three rings is avowedly drawn from the Decameron of Boccaccio, *Giornata Prima, Novella iii.;* and, indeed the character of Nathan himself is founded on that of the Jew Melchisedec in the same tale.

It has been supposed that Boccaccio found the outline of the story in a romance called *Fortunatus Siculus,* by Busone da Gubbio, who, in turn, had himself drawn it from the well-known collection of tales entitled the *Cento Novelle Antiche.* Professor Bartoli, indeed, has traced the episode to the Hebrew historical collection called *Shebet Jehuda,* from which it would seem to have found its way into the *Gesta Romanorum,* and thence to the *Cento Novelle.* It may be added that a somewhat similar idea is embodied in the ancient Roman story of Numa and the *Twelve Ancilia.*

[For a survey of the sources and analogues, see Section V of the Editor's Introduction.]

It is some satisfaction to note that the apologue itself declares that one of the rings—and one only—was true and genuine; while the other two were spurious imitations. Thus the Christian can enjoy the assurance that the story involves no necessary imputation on the verity of his own creed.

Note 32. Page 258.

In the Promised Land,
Land therefore ever to be praised by me,
I've laid aside full many a prejudice.

In these lines, as has been observed by the commentators, there is a sort of play on the word *gelobt* in the original. In the first clause of the passage it is the participle of the verb *geloben,* to promise, and it of course means the promised land in the biblical sense. In the second clause it is the

participle of the verb *loben,* to praise, and the Templar implies that it must ever be praised by him because in it he had "laid aside full many a prejudice." This play upon the two words necessarily evaporates in translation.

NOTE 33. PAGE 258.

And 'tis a better one,
More fitted for my father's native skies.

In case of possible misconstruction it should here be noted that this rendering is the true and only possible interpretation of the sense of the original. Most translators have strangely misconceived the meaning of the words *väterlichen Himmel,* which they render variously, but quite erroneously, as *"my paternal home above," "my father's heavenly home,"* and the like. This makes absolute nonsense; and the mistake has arisen from supposing the word *Himmel* here to mean heaven. Now this word, like *coelum* in Latin, *ciel* in French, and even the Greek *uranos,* as in *Herodotus* i. 142, means not only heaven, but also a particular climate, hence the quarter of the world where such a climate prevails, and hence, lastly, any particular region, zone, or country. The English *sky,* especially in the plural, is sometimes used in the same sense, and *clime* is almost interchangeable with *region.*

The meaning of the present passage is this. Tales and rumors heard in his infancy have given rise in the Templar's mind to a shadowy and dim suspicion of his father's eastern origin, and of his disregard of the barriers of creed in his adoption of a wife; and now, while meditating on the change which the alchemy of love is rapidly working on his own character and sentiments, and specially on his growing emancipation from the prejudices of his western training, and his readiness to set at nought the obstacles which creed and custom have interposed between him and his beloved, the Templar characterizes his new-born liberality of thought as being more in harmony with the probable character and sentiments of his eastern father, and more in conformity with his

presumed principles—"more fitted for my father's native skies."

Note 34. Page 261.

When the two passions waited but your nod
To melt in one?

In this passage most translators erroneously suppose the word *beide,* both, to refer to the Templar and Recha. This is entirely mistaken. It refers to the two sentiments of gratitude and love, which the Templar here declares were on the point of melting or combining into one—that is, into love alone.

Note 35. Page 261.

Young Templar, you are too precipitate.

The expression *Ihr überrascht mich* in this line is generally translated, *you surprise me.* But this is not the true sense of the words in this passage. Nathan was not, and could not be, surprised at the Templar's passion for Recha, which he had already plainly perceived, and had actually desired to see. What he means is that the knight is going too fast, and that his love cannot be approved or accepted until the mystery is cleared up concerning his birth, as is made apparent by Nathan's very next remark.

Note 36. Page 263.

A fig for sneers at bastards and the like;
The stock, I trow, is not to be despised.

Compare *King Lear,* Act I., Scene ii.—the soliloquy of Edmund.

Why bastard? Wherefore base?
When my dimensions are as well compact,
My mind as generous, and my shape as true,
As honest madam's issue?—*Sqq.*

Note 37. Page 267.

If I but substitute
For Saviour, Providence, she's right enough.

Some hold that this passage indicates that the Templar is, or has become, an unbeliever in Christianity. This seems an erroneous conception. In point of fact, the expression merely indicates that the knight, who still imagines Recha to be a Jewess, and who applies to her position the remark just uttered by Daya, thinks it inappropriate to talk of the intervention of the Saviour in her case, and would therefore substitute the word Providence.

Note 38. Page 267.

But, oh, this is the land
Of miracles.

Daya characterizes the Holy Land as the land of miracles not only for obvious biblical reasons, but also as a prelude to the announcement which she is about to make; and as appropriate to her belief that the Templar is the chosen instrument of God for the salvation of Recha.

Note 39. Page 277.

See, by a happy chance he comes himself.

Lessing, in his impersonation of the Patriarch, had in view the notorious Heraclius of Auvergne, who, as Patriarch of Jerusalem, proved himself a scandal alike to his church and to humanity. Historians have called him "the infamous Heraclius"; and Lessing himself has recorded his regret that in his play he has failed to make him appear nearly as wicked as he was.

In strict historical accuracy the Patriarch could not, of course, have been residing at Jerusalem at the time figured in the action of the play, since, when Saladin occupied that city, all the Christians who had been dwelling there were obliged to leave it. This, however, was not overlooked by Lessing, who has admitted the liberty thus taken by him with the facts of history. [See *Note by the Editor,* at the end of these Notes.]

Note 40. Page 280.

Who would dare to judge
The eternal laws of Heaven's majesty
By paltry canons of punctilio?

In this whole speech the Patriarch—although with characteristic astuteness he does not actually specify the point—animadverts bitterly on the recent rejection by the Templar of the base proposal which he, the Patriarch, had made to the knight through the agency of the lay-brother, as described in the fifth scene of the first act—the proposal, namely, that the Templar should not only abuse the liberty which, by the clemency of Saladin, he enjoyed at Jerusalem, by acting as a common spy in the interests of the crusaders, but that he should actually assassinate the Sultan, who had just generously spared his life. The scorn and indignant loathing of the Templar at the idea of a crime so detestable in itself and so additionally horrible by reason of its foul ingratitude, the Patriarch with execrable cynicism here characterizes as a paltry and irritating punctilio.

Note 41. Page 281.

And I'd refer you to the theatre
Where points like this are argued *pro* and *con*.

Some commentators have found a difficulty in this allusion to the theatre, on the ground that points like that referred to in this passage cannot well be said to be discussed or argued *pro* and *con* on the stage. This, however, seems hypercritical, since such points might well be discussed or otherwise treated both in the drama and in other fiction. But if the force of the objection be admitted, the difficulty may be solved by assuming with Professor Buchheim that the word *theatre* in this passage should be taken as referring to the public halls of colleges and academies, which are used for purposes of discussion and demonstration, and which were, and still are, called *theatres*.

Note 42. Page 286.

I only hope we still
May meet the charges at the Sepulchre.

This expression is a reference to the historic fact that, after his occupation of Jerusalem, Saladin not only extended to all Christian pilgrims free access to the Holy Sepulchre, and abolished the "pilgrim's tribute" which had previously been exacted from them, but also made liberal contributions to such of them as were poor and needy, as the most of them were.

Note 43. Page 290.

The original word here translated as "the Moslem robe" is *Jamerlonk*. No such word, and no word at all resembling it, can be traced in Richardson's Arabic and Persian dictionary. Lessing has recorded that he understood it to mean the cloak or wide mantle used by the Arabs. Buchheim regards it as a Turkish word, and as a corruption of the Persian *Jaghmurlik;* but no word at all resembling this latter can be found in Richardson. There can be little doubt that, whatever its original source of form, it is a term which has undergone considerable corruption; but there is equally little doubt that it is intended to convey the idea of a robe or mantle.

Note 44. Page 290.

The hero who belike had liefer been
A delver in the garden of the Lord.

Here the Templar, pursuing the simile first used by Saladin, merely alludes to the natural gentleness and humanity of the Sultan, who, he implies, if he had been left to his natural bent, would probably have preferred peaceful and beneficent pursuits to the violent commotions of war.

Note 45. Page 291.

'Tis too much gain for any single day.

When Saladin refers to what has befallen on that day as being too much gain for any single day, he alludes to the double acquisition of the Templar and of Nathan; and it is the thought of this latter which leads to the somewhat abrupt introduction of his name at this point.

Note 46. Page 298.

Save, indeed,
This very fear itself.

Saladin implies that he is reminded of his brother by the very fear which the Templar evinces lest his conduct may have caused him to forfeit the good opinion of the Sultan. That very fear, he conceives, would have been felt and betrayed by Assad under similar circumstances, and thus the Templar resembles him in this as well as in other respects.

Note 47. Page 306.

Not long ago I filled a hermit's cell
On Quarantana.

Quarantana, or Quarantania, is the name of the high and precipitous mountain lying between Jericho and Jerusalem, where, according to local tradition, Christ is supposed to have passed his fast of forty days and forty nights, and to have undergone the temptation of Satan. Hence its name. In later times it was much resorted to by pilgrims and hermits.

Note 48. Page 309.

It was at Darún
I gave it to you.

Darún was a hamlet in the neighborhood of Gath.

Note 49. Page 312.

The Christians had slaughtered every Jew
Who dwelt in Gath.

Strictly speaking, Gath had ceased to exist as a city at the time represented in this drama. The introduction of its name is a pure poetical license.

Note 50. Page 321.

What can it be
That makes me now, so near my closing scene,
Suddenly wish to be an altered man?

The allusion here is to Saladin's new-formed resolution to endeavor to practise economy in his expenditure, previously referred to in the third scene of the fourth act.

Note 51. Page 324.

I'll ne'er again put foot within his doors.

It will be remembered that, towards the close of the fourth scene of the fourth act, Saladin had commanded the Templar to go to Nathan, and bring him to the Sultan's presence. His reluctance to enter Nathan's house is explained by what passed in the ninth scene of the third act, especially in its closing lines.

Note 52. Page 326.

And have I merited the scorn
With which I was dismissed by Saladin?

For the explanation of this expression see the latter part of the fourth scene of the fourth act, where Saladin had to reprove the vehemence of the Templar, besides reproaching him for having applied to the Patriarch before coming to the Sultan; and where, also, he questions the stability of his attachment to Recha.

Note 53. Page 336.

Nay, for that
Let him be thankful to the Patriarch
Who has more cause than I.

In this expression the Templar refers to the Evil One; implying that Satan is the one whom the Patriarch has ever most sedulously served.

Note 54. Page 338.

Our angel, be assured,
Will ever prove right worthy of our love.

Most translators have erroneously supposed that the German pronoun *er*, in the first of these lines, refers to Recha's new-found brother. In point of fact, it refers to the word *angel* used by the Templar two lines previously; that is to say, to Recha herself.

NOTE BY THE EDITOR

The original MS. of the first draft of "Nathan," comprising sixty pages in quarto, in possession of a member of the Mendelssohn family in Berlin (see facsimile inserted elsewhere in this volume) and recently reproduced by photographic process and separately transliterated, in one hundred copies, by the "Insel-Verlag," F. Richter, Leipzig, to whom we likewise owe a complete reprint in facsimile of the first edition, in imitation of the original binding, has some interesting notes and references to which it is well to call the student's attention.

From a notation on the first page of the MS. we learn that the poet began the versification of his drama on November 14, 1778, concluding the fifth Act, March 7, 1779.

In the first draft he calls DAJA *Dinah,* and states that the name Daja signifies *nutrix* (nurse), according to the Arab historian Abufelda, extracts from whose Life of Saladin he seems to have read in one of the works of Schultens, a German Orientalist of the eighteenth century. Lessing adds that the Spanish *Aya,* which Covarruvias derives from the Greek *ago, paidagogos,* is equivalent to *Daja,* and conjectures that the Arabic word must have been borrowed from the Greek. That the author consulted historical works upon which he based his statements, is evidenced by the data he assembles at the end of the manuscript of his original draft, which concludes with the following significant paragraphs:

> "In dem Historischen was in dem Stücke zu Grunde liegt, habe ich mich über alle Chronologie hinweg gesetzt; ich habe sogar mit den einzeln Namen nach meinem Gefallen geschaltet. Meine Anspielungen auf wirkliche Begebenheiten, sollen blos den Gang meines Stücks motiviren. So hat der Patriarch Heraklius gewiss nicht in Jerusalem bleiben dürffen, nachdem Saladin es eingenommen.

> Gleichwohl nahm ich ohne Bedenken ihn daselbst noch an, und betaure nur, dass er in meinem Stücke noch bey weitem so schlecht nicht erscheint, als in der Geschichte."

We quote the original text advisedly, because of its important bearing upon the charge frequently brought against the author by captious critics that his delineation of the character of the Patriarch is needlessly caustic and prejudiced, induced by his strong bias in favor of Judaism.

It remains to be said that in the MS. of the original draft *Recha* is called *Rahel.* The form *Rica,* as a name for Jewesses, is mentioned by Zunz, *Namen der Juden* (Leipzig, 1837, p. 88). It survives in many Portuguese-Jewish families in America.

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